Dzie moj kraj?
Where is My Motherland?

Uladzimir Karatkevič

Dedicated to
the fighters for Belarusan Independence



Alieh Trusaŭ



The Country We Don't Know

Belarus in its Ethnic Borders

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The Country We Don't Know

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Content

Foreword

I began to write this book long ago when I set down a series of audio programs for Radio Liberty[1] in which I spoke about the many states established by our ancestors in Eastern Europe. I worked with Viačaslaŭ Rakicki then and it took us several months to make one radio program. First, we collected all possible information; great efforts were made to find the rarest historic facts still unknown to the majority of radio listeners. We also quoted from different written sources during our broadcasts. Naturally, I couldn't say all I wanted to in a 10–12 minute program, so I published a longer version in the newspaper «Naša Slowa». To support these centuries' old facts the articles were supplemented with illustrations and historic maps.

The program about my small motherland — The Grand Duchy of Smalensk — attracted particular interest of radio listeners. The text was placed on **Radio Liberty's** website and republished in independent regional periodicals. These articles from the newspaper **«Naša Slowa»** were copied and passed to families and friends to read.

Then I decided to collect all my publications about the ethnographic territories of Belarus, those which were fully and completely formed by the end of the 19th — beginning of the 20th century, together in one book. At the same time I read the latest publications on the ethnic and political history of Belarus, reviewed them and published my conclusions in the newspaper «Naša Slowa». Those reviews made the second part of the book (see: edition, 2009).

The main territories of Belarusans had been fully outlined by the second half of the 19th century when all Belarus was part of Imperial Russia. Russian scientists could no longer conceal the fact that the indigenous Slavic people were living on these lands. They received a new name that of 'Belarusans'. This word replaced the old name of Lićviny/Litviny. At the time of the 1897 census Belarusans proved to be a strong force in recognizing their origins. New maps identified such cities

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[1] Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) is a broadcaster funded by the U.S. Congress that provides news, information, and analysis to countries in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Middle East where the free flow of information is either banned by government authorities or not fully developed. RFE/RL is supervised by the Broadcasting Board of Governors, a bi-partisan federal agency overseeing all US international broadcasting services.

(including their regions) as Vilnia, Troki, Dzvinsk, Smalensk and Bransk, Staradub and Bełastock as Belarusan.

In 1882, not long before the 1897 census, Belarusan ethnic territory was outlined in the third volume of 'Picturesque Russia'. Consequently, on March 25, 1918 the Belarusan National Republic (BNR) was declared in its ethnic borders. The former effort to establish the Lithuanian-Belarusan country as an heir of the GDL (Great Duchy of Litva) was not supported by Lithuanians.

On January 1, 1919 the Bolsheviks in Smalensk declared the BSSR to be in the same ethnic borders as the BNR. Unfortunately, the BSSR seceded from the USSR with tangibly less territory, because its borders had been changed many times during the 20th century. However, Lithuania, which was lucky to be a part of the USSR for only 50 years, left it considerably bigger in size. After Stalin gave Vilnia with its administrative region to Lithuania and Bielastok with its administrative region to Poland, the question of returning them was quashed. It was also forbidden to mention the Belarusan territories outside the borders of the USSR (Bielastok for example) as formerly Belarusan.

«The chief» Soviet historian of the post Second World War Belarus Laŭren Abecedarski wrote in the widely known pamphlet «In the Light of Hard Facts», Minsk, 1969: «The GDL encompassed the lands of Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine and a part of Russian territories (by the end of the 15th century the GDL borders included Rzhev, Mojaisk, Kaluga and Tula)». It is understandable why he didn't comment on the fact that on those «Russian» lands there still lived a significant number of Belarusans at the end of the 19th century who didn't consider themselves as Russians despite the long years of 'Russification'. In the Soviet BSSR it reached the point when even the name of the Belarusan ancient capital Vilnia, was not allowed to be written as such, but instead Vilnius was to be used and it was closely watched by the authorities. Abecedarski and his followers insisted that before 1919 Belarusans did not have a national identity. This lie permeated all textbooks of the time.

Nowadays every Belarusan knows about the Polatsk (Polack) State, the GDL, BNR and BSSR. But how about other states of our ancestors? Why aren't they mentioned in school textbooks? Why is there no paragraph mentioning the Great Duchy of Smalensk, which was established by the Belarusan tribe of Kryvičy and had been an independent European country from the 12th to 15th centuries?

The leader of Belarus Aliaksandar Lukašenka once said regarding Smalensk: «I was born near Orša, which is not far from Smalensk. Which is prevailing in Smalensk: Russian or Belarusan? No one can tell» (The newspaper «Zvyazda», N196, October 15, 2007).

Our ethnic territories attract attention of economists as well. For example Uladzimir Akulich wrote that «Belarus can expect the main immigration flows to be from the provincial regions of Russia. This is a lot, if we consider the fact that one third of the ethnic lands of Belarus are a part of Russia. These are Smalensk

and Bransk oblasts — part of Pskoŭ, where the majority of 'russified' Belarusans live» (The magazine «Belarusans and the Market», N43, 27 December, 2007).

In 1992 the fact that the Republic of Belarus has ethnic territories outside its borders was acknowledged by China. This is what the first Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus Pietr Kraŭčanka wrote about it: «As a result we have ultimately reached agreement to be signed in the version suggested by us. This meant that a large country such as China, which is also a member of the Security Council of the UN, recognizes that Belarus has territories beyond its borders. It is clear that it is impossible to realize this approach now. However, our people have a good proverb: "Store is no sore". And it can't be disputed».

For writing this book I used different sources from numerous books and essays to newspaper articles and other publications.

I have to say that even encyclopedias give different descriptions of the historic events, different dates and names of the historic personalities and places.

That is why I decided to write my book in the popular science genre and ask my readers to bear with me for possible mistakes and inaccuracies; I didn't work from archives but only used published materials, therefore accuracy can't be guaranteed.

For the interested reader there is a list of some of the literature I used in the writing of this book.

The first edition was published in 2009. It has two parts: the first «The Unknown Belarusan Countries» and the second «Books Recommended for Reading» (including reviews of newly published historic books).

When the book was published I received favorable feedback not only from readers in Belarus but also from those who live in the former Belarusan territories in Russia. My book is known in Tsver, Bransk and Smalensk. I am also corresponding with a number of my devoted readers.

I had the idea to translate the book into other languages. Anatol' Taras, Belarusan publisher and author of historic books, was the first to do it. In the second edition of the Belarusan historic digest «Dzedy» (Grandfathers), 2009, two parts from my book were featured. The first was called «The Country of Our Ancestors» and consisted of the chapters about the Pskoŭ Feudal Republic, the Grand Duchy of Smalensk, and the Grand Duchy of Tsver. The second part was called «Central Lithuania».

Later on I had the opportunity to translate the first part of my book «The Unknown Belarusan Countries» into English. The translation was made by an international team of Carol Rouse (United Kingdom) and Natalia Labanava (Belarus). As the work progressed they made a number of Wikipedia references to support my narrative and in some cases found references which connected separate historic events in our country's story.

I express my gratitude to Liavon Barščeŭski for consultation on transcription of the Cyrillic Belarusan names into their Latin version.

The English text of the book is somewhat different from the original as new additions were included from sources published later.

The Unknown Belarusan Countries

The Colonies of Belarus

Many countries, whether big or small, have had colonies in different parts of the world. For example, until quite recently the relatively small country of Portugal had colonies in Africa and Asia, such as Angola and Mozambique, but what about Belarus, did the Belarusans have colonies? Did they have any territories dependant upon them? Yes, and for quite a long time. Free access to the sea for the land-locked state has always been economically important.

The first two colonies: Gercike and Kukenois, which lay on the Western Dzvina River, were conquered by the Polatsk State[1]. These became vassal Polatsk principalities. Their origins go back to the 10–11th centuries. The city of Gercike — the first Polatsk outpost on the Livonian and Semigals lands — already had powerful fortifications in the 10th century. In the *Livonian Chronicles* this city is mentioned in the year 1203. It was a rich city with several Orthodox Churches and a Knyaz (Duke). The old German tribes called him King. Another Polatsk colony — Kukenois (Koknese nowadays) appeared around 9th century, it was situated further to the West of Gercike, some 338 km



Remains of the city (haradzišča) and the castle in Kokenhausen (Kukenois)

[1] Polatsk is one of the most ancient cities of the Eastern Slavs. Primary Chronicle date Polatsk to the 862 year. The Norse sagas describe the city as the most heavily fortified in all of Rus’.



Gercike archaeological evidence from 11–13th centuries

from the metropolis[1] of Polatsk. In the German Chronicles of the year 1205 it is written that there «sat» King Viačka[2] in the city of Kukenois.

In 1106 the Semigals rose in rebellion against Polatsk, but they were defeated. More obedient to Polatsk were the Livonians. In 1186 together with Polatsk knyazes they set out to take



The seals made for the trade agreement between Riga and Polatsk in the year 1330

[1] Metropolis is the state in relation to the settlement/colonies.

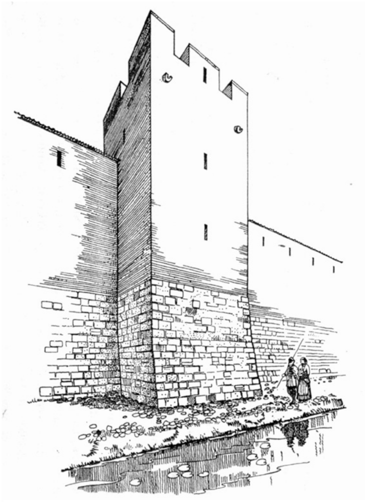
[2] Viačka (Vyachka of Koknese, also Vetseke of Kokenhusen; 1175–1180) was the ruler of the Principality of Koknese in present-day Latvia, a vassal of Polatsk, who unsuccessfully tried to establish himself as a local ruler first in Latvia and then in Estonia, and fought against the expansionism of the Livonian Knights at the turn of the 13th century. His name is the Old Noŭharad dialect form of Vyacheslav.

According to Russian sources, his father is supposed to have been a Rurikid prince of Drutsk. Another interpretation, based on evidence from the Chronicle of Henry of Livonia, is that he came from the local élite, perhaps a Livonian, who converted to Orthodox Christianity and became a vassal of Polatsk, whereupon he changed his name to the East Slavic Viačka.

The Chronicle says the population of Koknese included Balts (Latgallians and Selonians) and even a German colony, in addition to the East Slavic element.

Drutsk[1]. Both colonies were major craft-trading centres and also tax collecting cities. The heads of the native tribes were in heteronomy to the Knyaz of Polatsk through the local knyazes.

Unlike the Crusaders, the Polatsk Knyazes did not force the Livonians, Semigals and Latgalians to adopt Christianity and relations between them were stable. However, the Crusaders as newcomers continued with the Polatskers' right to raise taxes from the Livonians. In 1186 the Polatsk Knyaz Uladzimir gave permission to the German missionary bishop Meinhard[2] to baptize the Livonians and other tribes as his



The Tower in Riga (13th century)

[1] Drutsk, or Druck, is a historical town in Belarus, 40 kilometres (ca. 25 miles) west of Mahilioŭ. The city was established in 1078 as an outpost of the Principality of Polatsk on the road from Polatsk to Kiev and Charnihaŭ. According to the Drutsk Gospel, the town was built around one of the oldest Christian churches in White Ruthenia erected in 1001. In the 12th century and 13th century it was a centre of the early medvieval Principality of Drutsk, ruled by the dukes of the Polatsk branch of the Rurikid dynasty. Since the 13th century there is only limited information about the town available in the chronicles.

[2] Saint Meinhard (died on August 14 or October 11, 1196) was a German Augustinian monk and the first Bishop of Livonia. His life was described in the Chronicle of Henry of Livonia. His body rests in the now-Lutheran Riga Cathedral. As a monk at the Segeberg Abbey, Meinhard was possibly inspired by Vicelinus missionary work among the Slavs. Meinhard traveled with merchants to Livonia on a Catholic mission to convert pagan Semigallians, Latgalians, and Livonians into Christianity. He settled on the Daugava River at Ikšķile (German: Üxküll) southeast of Riga. In 1185–1186 he built a stone church, dedicated to Our Lady. Following an attack by the Lithuanians, Meinhard brought stonemasons from Gotland to build a fortress to defend against future attacks. These were the first known stone buildings among the Baltic tribes. Remains of the church survive to this day.

flock[1]. In 1201 German merchants and monks established the city of Riga at the mouth of the Dzvina River and in 1202 on the conquered territories Bishop Albert from Bremen created the Order of The Livonian Brothers of the Sword to aid in the conversion of the pagans to Christianity and, more importantly, to protect German trade and secure German control over commerce. As a result Polatsk was cut off from the sea.

It is worth mentioning at this point that in 1204 crusaders looted and seized Constantinople, the capital of the Orthodox Christianity[2]. Constantinople was located on important east-west and north-south trade routes. Further to the east was another important trading port — Trebizond. The exact routes varied over the years affected by wars and the political situation. However, the sack of Constantinople by Latin crusaders was an economic catastrophe for the area from the Baltic to Byzantium, through which went the **trade route from the Varangians to the Greeks**[3].

Military action between the crusaders and Polatsk began in 1203. In 1206 the Polatsk army besieged Riga and castle Holm, but could not conquer them, because the crusaders were better armed. The Crusaders' ballistae killed and wounded Polatsk horse riders from a great distance.

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[1] Pope Celestine III called for a crusade against pagans in Northern Europe and when peaceful means of conversion failed to produce results, forcible measures were employed. Pope Innocent III issued a bull declaring a crusade against the Livonians to avenge Berthold's defeat. Albrecht von Buxthoeven was consecrated as bishop in 1199 and arrived with a large force in 1200, establishing Riga as the seat of his bishopric in 1201.

[2] The Byzantine Empire had a major influence upon Orthodox Christianity. For the duration of the Empire, Eastern Orthodoxy developed as the form of Christianity which was mandated and supported by the Byzantine state apparatus. Its influence spread outside of the Empire's borders, eventually creating a «Byzantine commonwealth» of Orthodoxy (a term coined by 20th century historians) throughout Eastern Europe. Early Byzantine missionary work spread Orthodox Christianity to various Slavic peoples, where it still is a predominant religion in countries such as Bulgaria, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Russia, Serbia, Romania, Belarus, and Ukraine.

[3] The trade route from the Varangians to the Greeks was a trade route that connected Scandinavia, Kievan Rus' and the Byzantine Empire. The route allowed traders along the route to establish a direct prosperous trade with Byzantium and prompted some of them to settle in the territories of present-day Belarus, Russia and Ukraine. That was a long-distance waterway including the Baltic Sea, several rivers, flowing into the Baltic Sea, rivers of the Dnieper river system with portages on the drainage divides.

As early as 1207 all the Livonian lands were defeated and its people were baptized by the Germans. Soon their army attacked the Polatsk colonies. First, in 1209 they conquered and destroyed Kukenois and built their own castle on the site, and then in the same year they captured Gercike and took prisoner, the wife of the local Knyaz Usevalad.



The Coat of Arms of Courland

In 1210 Polatsk's Knyaz Uladzimir signed a peace treaty with Bishop Albert and a trade agreement with Riga, and in 1214 he surrendered the cities of Kukenois and Gercike to the Crusaders. In 1264, when the Crusaders' territories came close to the boarders of the Polatsk state, the Knyaz (Gerden) signed an agreement with them, which defined the rights of the Polatsk merchants in Riga and those of the German merchants in Polatsk. The Germans built a stone castle named after St. Peter in Polatsk and kept their valuables in its fortified towers for safekeeping. There was also an Orthodox Polatsk Church in Riga. Eventually the Polatsk state became a part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL)[4].

[4] Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL) developed from the Duchy of Navaharodak (Navagrudak in modern Belarus). The territory of the Duchy of Novaharodak, which had been colonized by both the Kryvičy and the Dryhvičy, extended along the Nioman river between Horadzien (currently known as Hrodna or Grodno) in the west and Novaharodak in the east. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL) existed in the center of Europe in the 13th–18th centuries and comprised entire territories of contemporary Belarus, Ukraine, partially Poland (Podliasse province and/or as part of a unified state), Lithuania (Lietuva) and Latvia and stretched from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. Belarus was a part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania during the whole period of its existence. Both Belarus and Ukraine point back to the days when they were part of the thriving GDL as proof of their cultural and political distinction from Russia. Successfully ruled by a dynastic line of dukes, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL) developed a highly advanced system of state administration and staved off invading Crusaders longer than any other Central European power. Its statesmen conducted effective foreign policy and military campaigns and created a multi-ethnic state. At its greatest extent in the 15th century, it was the largest state in Europe. It was a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional state with

The territories taken by the Germans lay to the north of the GDL and were given the name of Livonia, or Liflandia, or Inflants. They formed a confederation of five states. Livonia was nominally governed by the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and the Pope of Rome. The confederation consisted of the Livonian (or Inflants) Order, Archbishoprics of Riga, The Bishopric of Courland, the Bishopric of Dorpat, and the Bishopric of Ösel-Wiek[1]. This situation existed until the middle of the 16th century, when the Livonian War[2] began. The

great diversity in languages, religion, and cultural heritage. The language of diplomacy and law was Belarusan.

[1] The Bishopric of Ösel-Wiek was a semi-independent Roman Catholic prince-bishopric in what is now the Saare, Hiiu and Lääne counties of Estonia. The bishopric was created as a state of The Holy Roman Empire on 1th October, 1228, by Henry, King of the Romans. One of the five members of the Livonian Confederation, the seat of the bishop was successively Leal (Lihula), Perona (Vana-Pärnu), Hapsal (Haapsalu), and the castle of Arensburg (Kuressaare) on the island of Ösel (Saaremaa); the cathedral and chapter remained in Hapsal. Administratively the state was divided into two bailiwicks (advocaciae, Vogteien). The bishop was also the lord of the Teutonic Order over its fiefs on the bishopric's territory.The principality ceased to exist in 1560 when its last prince-bishop, Johannes V von Münchhausen, sold it to Denmark. King Frederick II of Denmark's brother Magnus, Duke of Holstein, was elected bishop on 13th May, 1560, despite being Lutheran. Denmark ceded Wiek (Lääne County) to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in exchange for parts of Ösel belonging to the Livonian Order. Later Ösel became a Danish possession.

[2] The Livonian War was fought between 1558–1583 for control of Old Livonia, the territory of present-day Estonia and Latvia. The Tsardom of Russia faced a variable coalition of Denmark–Norway, the Kingdom of Sweden and the union (later commonwealth) of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland.

The Livonian Order managed to maintain an independent existence. During many years of Livonian War (1558–1582), however, they suffered a decisive defeat by troops of Muscovite Russia in the Battle of Ergeme in 1560 and continued living under great threat. Letters to the Emperor arrived from many European countries, warning that Moscow has its eyes on much more than only a few harbors or the province of Liefland, and the East Sea (Ostsee-Baltic Sea and the West Sea (Atlantic) are equally in danger. Duke Barnim the Elder, duke of Pomerania for 50 years, warned that never before did he experience fear than now, when even in his own land there were people sent by Moscow everywhere. At stake was the Narva-Trade-Route and practically all trade in the North, and with that all of Europe. Due to religious upheavals of the Reformation the empire could not send troops, which it could not afford and



Courland. Rundale Palace, built in Baroque style by Architect Rastrelli in 1736

troops of Ivan the Terrible, who conquered the Khanate of Kazan before the war, defeated the port of Narva in 1558, and with that the trade with Noŭharad was resumed. Muscovite troops quickly conquered the major part of Livonia, burning and pillaging the towns and castles. Every state of the Livonian confederation defended itself as best it could.

In 1560 Ösel's Bishop sold his lands to the Danish King's brother Magnus[1] as did the Archbishop of Revel, but in 1561 Revel and the northern part of Estonia were defeated by Sweden. In 1560 Johannes V von Münchhausen, the Bishop of Courland, sold his Bishopric to the Danish King, who later passed these lands to his brother Magnus. This way the Danish state gained the northern part of Latvia and the southern part of Estonia.

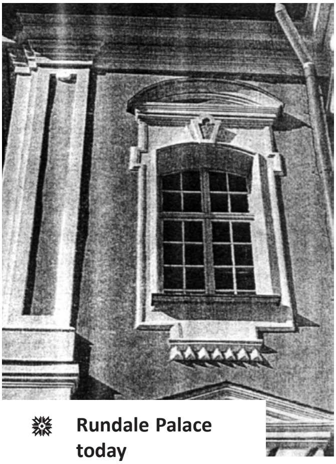
The Livonians decided to entrust their fate to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. On March 5, 1562 Gotthard Kettler, a magistrate of the Livo-

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which were too far away anyway. Prussia was not able to help for much of the same reason, and Duke Albrecht was under continuous ban by the emperor. The Hanseatic League was greatly weakened by this and the city state of Luebeck fought its last great war. The emperor Maximilian II diffused the greatest threat by remaining on friendly terms with the tsar, but not sending him troops as requested, in his struggles with the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

[1] Duke Magnus was born at Copenhagen Castle in 1540 as the second son of King Christian III of Denmark and Norway and Dorothea of Saxe-Lauenburg. At the age of 17 he was sent to Germany to be educated at various German courts. Following the death of his father in 1559, he returned to Denmark for the coronation of his older brother, King Frederick II of Denmark. The same year the prince-bishop of Ösel-Wiek in Old Livonia sold his lands to King Frederick II for 30,000 thalers. To avoid hereditary partition of his lands, King Frederick II gave that territory to his younger brother Magnus on condition that he renounced his rights to succession in the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein. In 1560 Magnus landed with an army on Saaremaa where he was immediately elected bishop by the chapter.

nian Order, passed the Seal and Riga's keys to Mikalai Radzivil Chorny and dissolved the Order. So Belarus had a colony again, and not the only one. It is worthwhile mentioning *The Chronicle of the Province* of *Livonia* written by the Estonian priest and school teacher Balthasar Russow. It was first published in 1578 in Rostock.



Rundale Palace today

«The great magistrate Gotthard Kettler advised the Polish King Zhygimont Augustus to take under his authority the undefeated Livonian territories. In return the King gave the great magistrate some lands and castles in Courland as well as bishoprics in Riga and made him Duke of Courland and Count Semigalski. That was the end of the Teutonic Order of magistrates in Livonia; two hereditary secular fiefdoms (principalities) appeared in its place: Courland, donated to the Duke, was one of them; the other, Lety's lands and the Riga Bishoprics, the King retained as his own property and it is still called Trans-Dzvina principality».

In 1566 the Sojm[1] of the GDL held in Brest (bel. Biarescie) elected Jan Hieronimowicz Chadkievič[2] to be ruler of Livonia. He succeeded in the complete incorporation of Livonia into the GDL, which happened by the end of 1566 at the Sojm held in Harodnia (Hrodna). The Livonians successfully lobbied to become part of the GDL, and at the same time they maintained their local rights. At the time of the signing of the Lublin Unia[3] the GDL managed to preserve their property rights in Livonia as in Trans-Dzvina as well as in the Courland principalities. Hence, up to the very end of the Rzecz Pospolita Courland remained a colony of the GDL as well as of the

[1] a congress of aristocracy — main ruling body of Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

[2] Jan Hieronimowicz Chodkiewicz (Ivan Hieronimovich) (1537–1579) Grand Pantler of Lithuania 1559, general starost of Samogitia 1563, Elder of Samogitia 1564, starost of Telszew and Ploeltsk 1566, Livonia Hetman and governor, Grand Marshal of Lithuania 1566, Kaunas starost 1569, Count on Szkłów 1568, Vilnia castellan 1574.

[3] July 1, 1569 the Lublin Unia merged the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania into a federal state — Rzecz Pospolita.

Crown of the Polish Kingdom[1]. (In international law when one territory belongs simultaneously to two countries is called a condominium.) In 1581 Sweden overthrew Moscovia in Narva and the Russian competitor's presence was removed from the Baltic Sea.

The main imported goods from Riga were salt and herrings, but trade also included fabrics, silk, wines, beer, spices, iron, copper, tin and lead which were delivered into the cities and castles of the GDL. From the GDL to Riga went timber, animal skins, tar, grain, hemp, flax, wax, tallow, and hemp oil, but the main export goods were wax, wood and grains. In winter iron goods were brought from Riga: frying pans, plough shares, axes and scythes.

The Belarusans had their river fleet. It consisted of large specialized ships, called *учаны*, also smaller boats and ferries and a twin-hull vessel — a forerunner of the catamaran. There were big barges too, which took loads of up to 12 thousand poods[2]. At huge cost of 300 copas[3] ship pilots manually navigated the ships around the rapids.

The historic destiny of the Belarusan colonies was interesting. Let's begin from the Trans-Dzvina Duchy, or the Principality of Inflants (Livland): at first, it was temporarily governed by magistrate Kettler, then, at the decision of the Sojm held in Harodnia on December 26, 1566 it was made part of the GDL. It was ruled by a Governor, appointed by the King and the Grand Duke of Lithuania. Its capital was *Dynaburg*. However, some 40 years later war between Sweden and Rzecz Pospolita broke out (1600–1629)[4]. The Swedish first attacked the Trans-Dzvina Duchy which practically collapsed.

After the Polish-Swedish War the GDL owned only Latgalia, but the southern part of Estonia and the north-western part of Latvia, including

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[1] The Crown of the Polish Kingdom, or simply the Crown, is the name for the unit of administrative division, the territories under direct administration of (mostly) Polish nobility from Middle Ages to late 18th century (currently lands of Ukraine, Poland, some border lands of inter alia: Russia, Belarus, Moldova, Slovakia, Romania). Some of them still belonged to the Kingdom of Poland, then to Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth until its final collapse in 1795.

[2] It is approximately 16.38 kilograms (36.11 pounds).

[3] 1 Copa consists of 60 groshaŭ.

[4] However, after the Polish-Swedish war (1600–1629) Riga came under Swedish rule in 1621. It became the largest and most developed Swedish city. During this time Vidzeme was known as the «Swedish Bread Basket» because it supplied the larger part of the Swedish kingdom with wheat. The rest of Latvia stayed Polish until the second partition of Poland in 1793, when it became Russian.

Riga, were incorporated into Sweden. After the Northern War in 1721 these territories were taken over by Russia.



Count Jakub

Latgalia as part of the GDL was divided into the four founder regions — starastva[1], which in 1667 were joined in the Inflanty voivodship with the centre in Dynaburg.

After the first partition of Rzecz Pospolita in 1772 Latgalia was taken over by Russia. First, in 1772–1776 it was a Trans-Dzvina province of Pskoŭ hubernia; then, in 1776–1796 it was included into Polatsk hubernia, and thereafter, in 1796–1802 — in Belarusan hubernia.

From 1802 and during the whole 19th century and later until 1917, Latgalia was a part of Viciebsk hubernia. On August 11, 1920 Lenin passed the three Viciebsk (partially inhabited by Belarusans) paviets: Trans-Dzvina, Režyck and Lucyn — to Latvia, on top he paid 4 million roubles in gold. In 1921 Lithuania passed 299 km^2 of the Iluki paviet to Latvia. Those lands mainly populated by Belarusans bordered Dzvinsk.

The historical destiny of the Duchy of Courland[2] was curious. First it was an autonomous part of the GDL. From 1617 to 1795 its state arrangements were determined by local legislation — The Statute of the Duchy of Courland. It was most powerful as country during the reign of Count Jakub (1640–1682), who had his own well equipped military and trade fleet, with which he conquered two colonies in Africa and America.

From 1651 to 1655 Courland owned the African country of Gambia. In the 15th century the Portuguese came to Africa, then, in the 16th — the English, French and Dutch struggled for supremacy in that region. From 1786 up to 1965 the country belonged to Britain.

The Island of Tobago in West-Indies belonged to Courland for a longer period, i.e. from 1645 to 1665. This mountainous island was strategically

[1] Starastva is the smallest administrative division. Voivodships, ruled by appointed officials — voivodes, were further subdivided into paviets (GDL).

[2] The Duchy of Courland and Semigallia was a semi-independent duchy that existed from 1561 until 1795, encompassing the areas of Courland and Semigallia. Although nominally a vassal state of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the dukes operated autonomously. In the 18th century Russia acquired great influence over the Duchy.

well positioned. It is 300 km^2 and covered with evergreen woods. Therefore, thanks to Courland the GDL once had a presence in Africa and in the New World.

In 1709 Frederik Willem Kettler became Herzog[1] of Courland, and a year later married Anna Ivanovna, Peter the Great's cousin. However, in 1711 he died and a struggle for power between Anna Ivanovna and Frederik's uncle Ferdinand began. The Russian government demanded that Courland paid an annual allowance in 40,000 roubles for Anna Ivanovna, who was soon to become the Russian Empress.

In 1726 the Courland parliament voted for Moritz of Saxony, a bastard son[2] of Augustus II the Strong, King of Rzecz Pospolita, to become Herzog of Courland. However, in September 1727 the country was occupied by Russian troops and they returned Ferdinand to power. In 1737 Duke Ernst Johann von Biron was elected as Herzog of Courland, he lived at Anna Ivanovna's court and became a regent of Russia.

Russian literature and history has a definition of 'Bironovshchina', the period when Ernst Johann von Biron[3], the lover of Anna Ivanovna[4], actually ruled Russia. (Anna took little interest in the affairs of state and left administration to her Grand Chamberlain and ministers.) Russian historians do not like this period in their history and consider it to be a time of decline and stagnation in Russia. However, one of the positive results was that the length of army service for soldiers was shortened to 25 years — as opposed to a lifetime — the same was true for the administrative service. In 1731 a Cabinet of Ministers was first formed and in 1734 a trade agreement with Great Britain was signed. Russian troops managed to capture the city of Azov from Turkey. Courland was flourishing as well, especially

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[1] German title of nobility.

[2] Some contemporary sources, including Wilhelmine of Bayreuth, claimed that Augustus had as many as 365 or 382 children. The number is extremely difficult to verify; Augustus officially recognized only a tiny fraction of that number as his bastards (the mothers of these «chosen ones», with the possible exception of Fatima, were all aristocratic ladies).

[3] He was married to Benigna Gottlieb von Trotha at Treyden (1703–1782) in 1723.

[4] At Anna's coronation (19th May, 1730) he became grand-chamberlain, a count of the Empire, on which occasion he is said to have adopted the arms of the French ducal house of Biron, and was presented with an estate at Wenden with 50,000 crowns a year.

its capital Mitava (known these days as Jelgava). It had wonderful palaces surrounded by parks.

After the death of the Russian empress in 1740 Biron was arrested and deprived of his all official capacities. However, in 1763 Catherine II returned Biron to power in Courland, but in 1769 he abdicated in favor of his son Peter.

In 1794 Courland's parliament opposed the Tadevuš Kaściuška uprising[1] and on March 7, 1795 voted for the annexation of Courland to Russia. On March 17 Duke Peter abdicated, and Courland disappeared from the map of Europe. In 1796 Courland Province was formed in Russia.

[1] Andrzej Tadeusz Bonawentura Kościuszko (February 4, 1746 — October 15, 1817) was a Polish-Lithuanian general and military leader during the Kościuszko Uprising. He is a national hero in Poland, Lithuania, the United States and Belarus. He led the 1794 Kościuszko Uprising against Imperial Russia and the Kingdom of Prussia as Supreme Commander of the Polish National Armed Force (Najwyższy Naczelnik Siły Zbrojnej Narodowej).

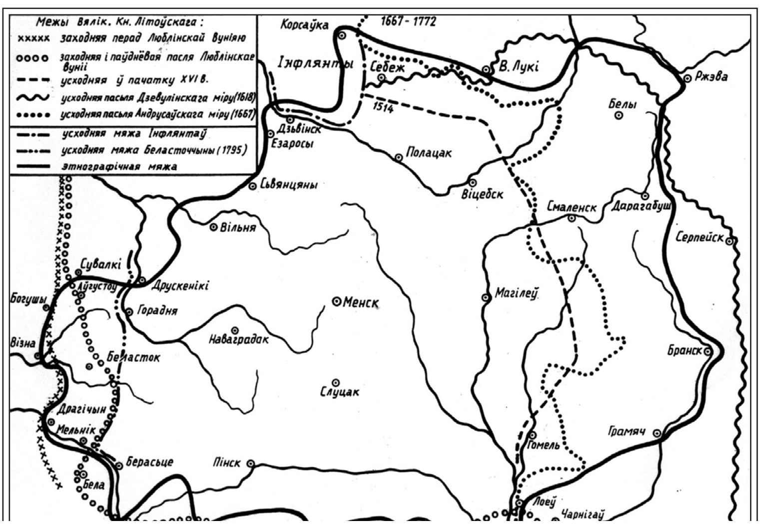
Before commanding the 1794 Uprising, he fought in the American Revolutionary War as a colonel in the Continental Army. In 1783, in recognition of his dedicated service, he was brevetted by the Continental Congress to the rank of brigadier general and became a naturalized citizen of the United States.

There are several Anglicized spellings of Kościuszko's name. Perhaps the most frequently-occurring is Thaddeus Kosciusko, though the full «Andrew Thaddeus Bonaventure Kosciusko» is also seen. In Lithuanian, Kościuszko's name is rendered as Tadas Kosciuška or Tadeušas Kosciuška. In Belarusan it is Tadevush Kastsyushka or Tadevuš Kaściuška.

The Trans-Dzvina Duchy (Dzvina Krai)

In the 19th and up to the beginning of the 20th century ethnographers considered The Trans-Dzvina province to consist of the three the most Western paviets of the Viciebsk Hubernia. These were: the Dzvina, Režyck and Lucyn, areas where the Latvians and the Belarusans lived together. However, there were settlements in these regions where Belarusan far exceeded Latvian, Russian and Jewish populations.

In 10–11th centuries the Kryvičy tribe, the ancestors of Belarusans, came to the territory of Latgalia, where from ancient times the Baltic tribe of Latgalians lived. The Kryvičy had the backing of a powerful state — the



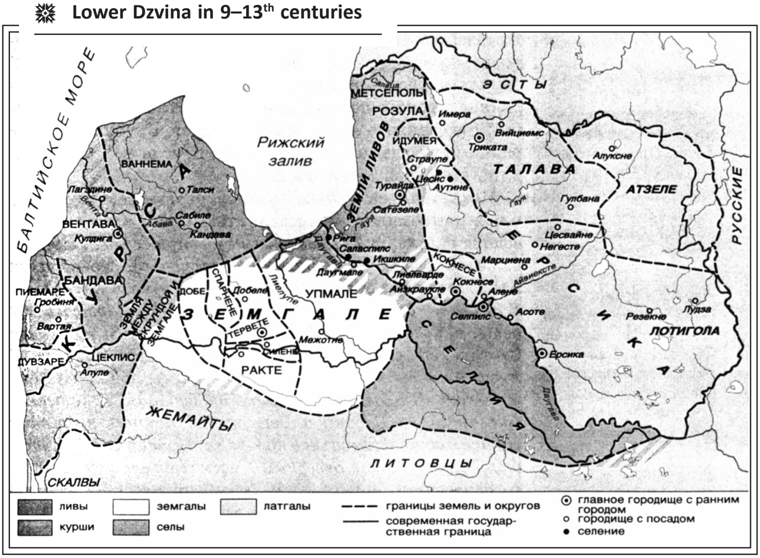
History of the Belarus Border according to Arkadź Smolič

Polatsk Duchy — and thanks to its support they established two vassal Duchies — Gercike and Kukenois. They both depended upon Polatsk and paid tax to it. These two were the first state formations in the territory of contemporary Latvia and that is why several historical text-books of the country write about them. It is true, that Latvian historians try to avoid mentioning the Slavic, the Kryvicy's origin of these Duchies and their Dukes. So, Knyaz Viačka, who ruled Kukenois, they call Vetseke, and Knyaz Usevalad, a ruler of Gercike, became Visvaldis.



Prince Usevalad, Lord of the Gercike, as painted by Liberts

The arrival of the Crusaders changed the situation in the Trans-Dzvina Duchy: in the beginning of the 13th century they captured the Polatsk's colonies. In 1214 this fact



Lower Dzvina in 9–13th centuries

was admitted by Polatsk Knyaz Uladzimir. In 1264 the Crusaders' lands lay close to Polatsk borders. Between 1275 and 1278 the Crusaders laid the foundations of a castle at Dynaburg on the boarder and over time a large city developed around it. Twice, in 1403 and 1418, the great Knyaz Vitaŭt[1] conquered the castle, but couldn't hold it for long.



The Coat of Arms of the Lower Dzvina Principality

In the 16th century (1558–1583) the Livonian War broke out and the situation changed to the advantage of the Kryvičy. After the Livonians were defeated by the troops of Ivan the Terrible the GDL established two colonies there: Duchy of Courland and Trans-Dzvina Duchy.

Dynaburg became the capital of Trans-Dzvina province, or Inflants Duchy. In 1577 the city and the castle were captured by the troops of Ivan the Terrible; however, within a year the GDL troops had recaptured it.

An ancient fortification was built between Lake Shchunya and the Western Dzvina River. It had the form of an irregular rectangle 18 meters wide and 60 meters long with six defending towers. In 1588 Stefan Batory[2], the first King of Rzecz Pospolita, built a new castle in Dynaburg and a city developed close by.

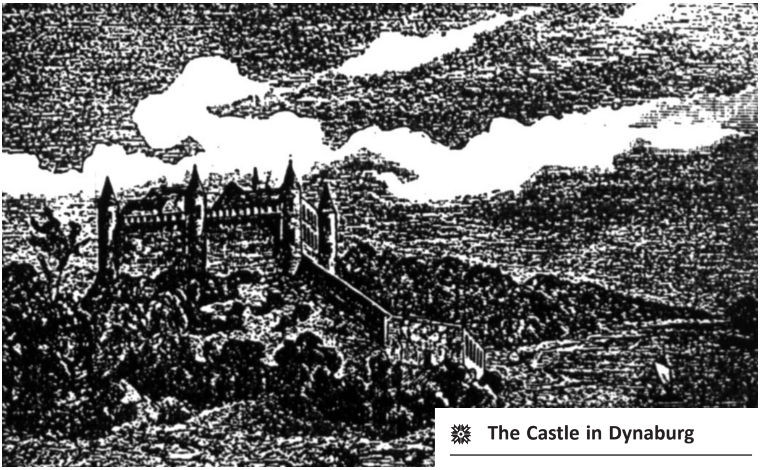
The King passed the former Order's property to his people and the power of the German feudals was diminished. Catholicism remained the state religion, Catholic cathedrals and Collegiums were being built and the first religious books in the Latvian language were written.

As a result of the war between Rzecz Pospolita and Sweden, the GDL lost southern Estonia and south-western Latvia with Riga.

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[1] Vitaŭt was the ruler (1401–1430) of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

[2] Stefan Batory (27 September 1533 — 12 December 1586) was a Hungarian noble Prince of Transylvania (1571–1586), then King of Poland (1576–1586) and Grand Duke of Lithuania (1576–1586). He was a member of the Somlyó branch of the noble Hungarian Batory family. Many historians consider him to be one of the greatest of the elected Kings of Poland.



The Castle in Dynaburg

Latgalia, which stayed in the GDL, was divided into the four regions: Dynaburg, Režyck, Lucyn and Marienhaus. By the GDL Sojm of 1667 these regions were assimilated into the Inflants Province with the centre in Dynaburg. In the city were the residences of the Bishop of Inflants and the headquarters of the local voivod[1].

In 1629 the voivod Hansieŭski opened the Jesuit College in the city of Dynaburg. At that time the city consisted of four parts: 1) The castle on the right bank of Dzvina; 2) An old outpost not far from the castle on the right shore of Lake Ščunia; 3) A new outpost a bit further from the castle; 4) A town settlement of Hryva on the left bank of the river, which belonged to Courland.

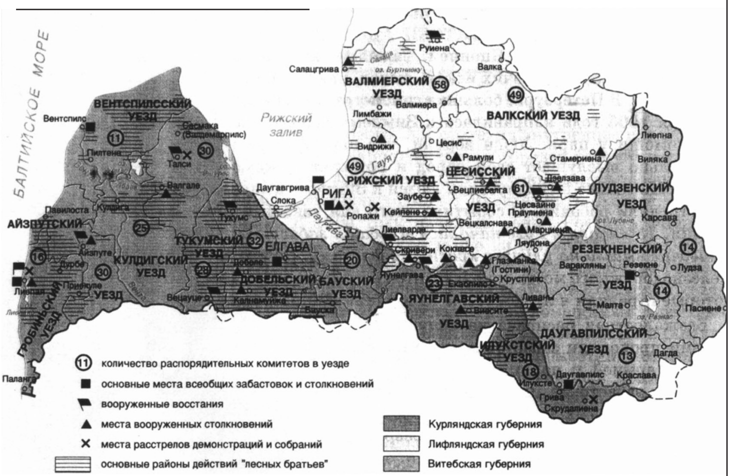
Another Belarusan city in Latvia was Kraslaŭ, or Kraslava. It was situated on the right bank of the Dzvina River, near the mouth of the Kraslaŭka River. In 1680 a Jesuit mission was opened there.

From 1730 the Platers family owned Kraslaŭ. In 1752 the voivod Mstsislaŭ Ludovik Plater built a gorgeous palace there with a park; in the city he built a town hall with a tower, a court yard, a hospital and a Catholic Monastery for The Sisters of Mercy. There was a library in a detached two-storied building. Craftsmen, invited by the voivod from Germany and Poland, lived in stone houses. They made carpets, velvet, percale and woolen cloth, arms, horse carriages and jewelry.

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[1] a Slavic term for a military commander or a governor of a voivodship — a type of administrative division dating to medieval Belarus, Poland etc.

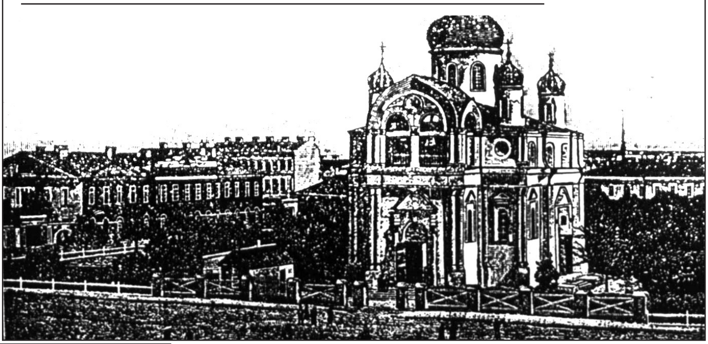
Map of Latvia in 1905–1907



The third city where the Belarusans lived was Lucyn, or Ludzen. There the Crusaders built a huge castle with six towers and three gates, one of which had a drawbridge.

According to the first partition of the Rzecz Pospolita, Latgalia became part of the Russian Empire. Initially (between 1776 & 1796) its Belarusan part became the Trans-Dzvina paviet of the Polatsk hubernia[1]. Later in

City of Dzvinsk in the beginning of the 20th century according to Arkadź Smolič



[1] oblast

1796–1802 it was incorporated into the Belarusan hubernia. From 1802 up to 1917 (the year of the October Revolution) Dynaburg, Režyck and Lucyn provinces were part of the Viciebsk hubernia of Belarus.

Trans-Dzvina province suffered much in the ravages of the Napoleonic War of 1812. At that time the city of Kraslava became the centre of local cultural life, here Adam Plater, graduate of the University of Vilnia and a fellow of the Vilnia Archeological Commission (1850) established a museum, a library and an archive. He was also curator of schools in Dynaburg province in Viciebsk hubernia.

In the first quarter of the 19th century a huge castle was built in Dynaburg. In 1831 a gymnasium was opened in the city, which later became a centre of Belarusan national revival in Dzvinsk and its regions. The city flourished in the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. It had two railways: The North-Western and the Riga-Orel. The city was also a large river port. It was a major commercial and industrial centre populated by Jews, Belarusans, and Russian Old-Believers[1]. The city was mostly surrounded by Belarusan villages. From 1893 until 1920 the city was named Dzvinsk afterwards it was renamed as Daŭgaŭpils.

After 1905 such personalities of the Belarusan revival, as the Epimach-Šypila[2]'s and the Gauronski's brothers, were active in Dzvinsk. In Latvia Ihnat Bujnicki, Nina Vatacy, Kastus Jezavitaŭ[3], Karus Kahaniec, Vacłaŭ

[1] In the context of Russian Orthodox church history, the Old Believers (Starovery, Russian: старове́ры or старообря́дцы) became separated after 1666 from the official Russian Orthodox Church as a protest against church reforms introduced by Patriarch Nikon between 1652–1666. Old Believers continue liturgical practices which the Russian Orthodox Church maintained before the implementation of these reforms.

[2] Branislaŭ Ihnatavič Epimach-Šypila, (16 September 1859, faĺvarak Sudzilovičy, Liepieĺ paviet Viciebsk hubiernia — 6 June, 1934, Leningrad), kryptanim: B. E.-Š (Б. Э.-Ш). Belarusan linguist, folklorist, literary critic, publisher, Professor of St. Petersburg University.

[3] Kanstantyn Jezavitaŭ (also spelled Ezavitaŭ), teacher, scholar, military and political leader. Jezavitaŭ was born in the city of Dzvinsk on November 17(5), 1893. He studied in Dzvinsk and graduated from the Viciebsk Teachers' Institute. Jezavitaŭ then completed the Pavlovsk Military College in St. Petersburg in 1916. Became involved in the Belarusan movement shortly before World War I. After the February Revolution, he began to organize Belarusan soldiers of Piatigorsk Regiment in preparation for the conference of Belarusan soldiers of the Northern Front which took place in Viciebsk in the Fall of 1917.

Map of Latvia from a school text-book. The Fight for power in Latvia in 1919



Jezavitaŭ was elected to membership in the Belarusan Military Council. He participated in numerous conferences in various cities of north-east Belarus, organizing the delegates to the All-Belarusan Congress. He also coordinated the activities of the military Belarusan groups. Jezavitaŭ took an active part in the proceedings of the Congress and was arrested by the Bolsheviks. Jezavitaŭ became the Belarusan Commander of the city of Miensk when the Belarusan administration took power on February 19, 1918. He was elected to the First People's Secretariat which became the first Belarusan Government in February of 1918. From 1918 to 1920 Jezavitaŭ served the Belarusan Democratic Republic in various capacities. After the revolutionary years, Jezavitaŭ settled in Dzvinsk, Latvia, where he organized a Belarusan school system and founded numerous Belarusan organizations. Jezavitaŭ and his close friends accomplished a great deal in Latvia. The Belarusan community in Latvia was one of the best organized of those outside the BSSR. At the same time Jezavitaŭ was a very prolific writer who authored dozens of articles and major works in many languages about Belarus and Belarusans. Some of his works are still valid down to today, e.g. his collection of documents on Polish-Belarusan relations (Biełarusy i Palaki, 1919).

Kanstantyn Jezavitaŭ was much involved in Belarusan political activities during World War II. He was appointed Commander of the Belarusan Armed Forces, 1944–1945. Jezavitaŭ was captured by the Soviets in the Berlin area in 1945, tried in Soviet Belarus, and executed, presumably in 1946.

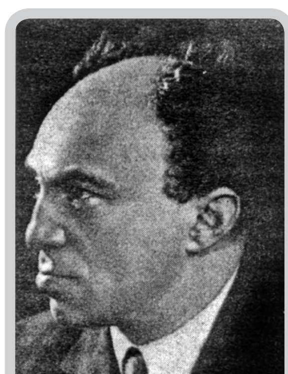
Lastoŭski and Ivan Luckevič lived and worked. These were followed by Jeŭdakim Ramanaŭ, who carried out the excavations of the well-known Lucyn burial grounds at the end of the 19th century.

According to the 1897 population census, 79,523 Belarusans lived in Latvia.



Map of Belarus as shown in newspaper «Zviazda», 1924, № 301

Balyaslaŭ Brežga (1887–1957) was born in Režyck paviet. He was one of the founders of the science of archiving in Belarus. He was also a famous archeologist, philologist and historian. From 1918 to 1922 he was the Director of the Viciebsk branch of the Moscow Archeological University (MAU). In 1922, after closure of the Viciebsk branch of the MAU, he worked in the State Archives of Viciebsk. From 1925 he lived in Latvia, he worked as a professor of the Archeological Department of the Russian Institute for Academic Knowledge. From 1937 he was an inspector and authority on monuments. In 1940–1941 he was the Director of the state archive of the Trans-Dzvina province. From 1946 he worked in the Institute of History and Material Culture of the Academy of Sciences of the LSSR (Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic). In 1933 in Vilnia he published his work *Castles of the Viciebsk Region*. In his studies he researched the relationship between the Belarusan and Latvian nations, the Polatsk chronicles, and also wrote the bibliography of the History of Belarus.



Solomon Michojeĺs (bel. Salamon Mikhoels)

Salamon Mikhoels (his real name was Shloime Vousi) was born in 1890 in Dzvinsk. He was a well-known actor, stage manager and artistic director of the Moscow State Jewish theatre, and a Chairman of Antifascist Committee. During the Second World War thanks to his efforts millions of dollars in donations were collected in the



Members of the newspaper «Holas Bielarusa» editorial board led by Jezavitaŭ, Riga, 1926

United States for the Soviet Union aid fund; he also facilitated the United States major military technical assistance to the USSR on the Lend-Lease Agreement. On January 12, 1948 he was murdered in Minsk on the secret orders of Stalin.

Before the First World War Dzvinsk was the second most populated Belarusan city. The population of Vilnia was 200,000; Dzvinsk — 120,000; Viciebsk — 115,000 and Minsk — 110,000. The city was a well developed industrial centre. There was a leather goods factory with 2,000 workers, three button factories, mills and breweries. Textile goods, wood and flax were also actively traded.

In 1915 Dzvinsk was in the front line of battle. In September 1917 a conference of the 5th Belarusan Military Army took place there. By its decision a Belarusan National Committee[1] was formed. In 1918 Dzvinsk and its province was occupied by the Germans, then by the Bolsheviks and

[1] Belarusan National Committee elected at the First Conference of the Belarusan National Organizations and Political Parties in Miensk, March 25–27, 1917. The Committee included: Raman Skirmunt, chairman; members: Paval Alaksiuk, Babarykin, Advardy Budźka, Alaksandar Burbis, Lavon Dubiejkaŭski, Usievaład Falski, Rev. Vincuk Hadleŭski, Vacłaŭ Ivanoŭski, Michał Kachanovič, Aŭhien Kančar, Karuś Kastravicki (Kahaniec), Ivan Kraskoŭski, Arkadź Smolič, Fabijan Šantyr, Branisłaŭ Taraškievič, Lavon Zajac, Źmicier Žyłunovič.

in 1920 — by the Poles. In 1920 the Belarus National Republic[1] (BNR) government (Rada) sat in Riga, it was headed by Vaclaŭ Lastoŭski[2]. The First Belarusan postal stamps «*A detached battalion of the Belarus Peoples Republic*» series were issued in Latvia.

On August 11, 1920 Lenin passed to Latvia the three paviets of the Viciebsk region partially populated by Belarusans: Dzvinsk, Režyck and Lucyn; on top he paid 4 million roubles in gold. In 1921 Lithuania gave Latvia 299 km^2 of the Iluki paviet, it bordered Dzvinsk and the majority of the population was Belarusan.

Adolf Joffe, the leader of the Russian delegation, declared that as a result of the peace agreement with Latvia, the Soviet Russia gained not only a window, but a wide open door into Europe in the form of two well established Latvian ports: Libava and Vindava.

After the First World War approximately 70,000 Belarusans, half of them Catholics and half Orthodox, remained the Dzvinsk part of Latvia. Belarusan cultural-educational organizations like *Backauščyna* (Fatherland), *Belarusan Hata* (Belarusan House), *The Belarusan Science and Regional*

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[1] The Belarusan People's Republic was a self-declared independent Belarusan state, which declared independence in 1918. It is also called the Belarusan Democratic Republic or the Belarusan National Republic, in order to distinguish it from Communist People's Republics. The BNR was recognized by several Central Powers and former Russian countries, but not by the majority of the international community, and ceased to exist when Belarus was taken under Soviet control and foundation of Belorussian SSR in 1919, though BNR authorities later formed a government in exile. The Belarusan People's Republic was declared on March 25, 1918 during World War I, when Belarus was occupied by the Germans according to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.

[2] Vaclaw Lastowski (Vaclaŭ Lastoŭski; 1883–1938) was a Belarusan critic, historian of literature, and politician. Was a member of Council of the Belarusan Democratic Republic. Has published many books about Belarus, recognized the right of the people of Belarus to self-determination. Such books as «History of Belarusan (Krivichian) book», «Short history of Belarus» propagandizes the idea.

In 1922–1925 he was the prime-minister of the BDR and initiator of dissolution of its exiled government which, in turn, did not mean a dissolution of the Council of the BDR its parliament in exile. Lastoŭski was also a member of the Academy of sciences of Belarus.

In 1938 he was arrested by the NKVD within the Case of the Union of Liberation of Belarus. He was sentenced to dispatch, but was seized and shot by the Soviets. He was married to writer Marija Ivanauskaitė–Lastauskienė.

National History Fellowship were active in the country at that time. In Riga a Belarusan Newspaper *The Voice of Belarusia* was published. Its Editor-in-Chief was Kastus Jezavitaŭ.

There were Belarusan Gymnasiums in Riga, Dzvinsk and Lucyn, and many schools operated. The first Belarusan School in Latvia was opened in 1921. By 1922 there were 46 schools teaching 3,500 pupils. In the Belarusan Gymnasium in Dzvinsk a monthly magazine *School Work* was published. There were 13 issues between 1926 and 1934, and in Lucyn — the magazine *Lastaŭka* (Swallow) was issued between 1923 and 1934. Thanks to Jan Rainis, a delegate of the Latvian Ministry of Education, a Belarusan Department was created there; it was headed by Siargei Saharaŭ[1]. However, in 1934, when Karl Ulmanis came to power, he instigated changes detrimental to the position of many Belarusans.

In 1940 the Belarusans of Latgalia[2] found themselves to be living in the USSR. Initially, during the Second World War, when the country was under the German occupation, Belarusan preparatory schools were permitted to operate and even the *Novy Šlach* (New Way) magazine was published, but later Belarusan cultural activity was forbidden.

After the war the Belarusan population of Latvia and Dzvinsk province continued to grow. In 1959 61,900 Belarusans lived in Latvia, growing to

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[1] Siargei Piatrovič Saharaŭ (September 29, 1880, Polack — April 22, 1954, Riga), Belarusan folklorist, ethnographer, church historian, essayist, teacher. Head of the Belarusan department of the Ministry of Education. From 1922 he lived in Latvia. After the Belarusan department was liquidated in 1925, he worked as Principal of the Belarusan gymnasium in Dzvinsk.

[2] Latgalia, or Latgale is one of the four historical and cultural regions of Latvia recognised in the Constitution of the Latvian Republic. It is the easternmost region north of the Daugava River. While most of Latvia is historically Lutheran, Latgale is historically predominantly Roman Catholic.

The region has a large population of ethnic Russians, especially in Daugavpils, the largest city in the region. Many of the Russians who lived in Latgale before the Soviet occupation are Old Believers. Rēzekne, often called the heart of Latgola, Krāslava, and Ludza are other large towns in the region, which also has a Belarusan minority. There is still a significant Polish minority (Daŭgaŭpils has almost as many Poles as Latvians). As part of the Polatsk and Viciebsk hubernias, the region was part of the Pale of Settlement and had a very large Jewish population — but most of the Jews perished in the Holocaust and much of the remainder has emigrated. The region is one of the poorest in the European Union, and unlike in the rest of Latvia, the majority of voters was opposed to EU membership in the referendum on accession.

120,000 in 1989 (with 10,000 living in Dzvinsk). The collapse of the USSR brought adverse changes to the proportion of Belarusans living in Latvia. In 2000 they numbered 97,000 but by mid-2011 this had dropped to only 68,000. However, this is still the second largest community after the Russian national minority living in Latvia. The majority of the Belarusan population now lives in Indra, Piedruja, Robežnieki volosts of the former Krāslava District. In these regions of Latvia the Belarusan language is widely spoken.

Latvia became independent in 1991 and Belarusan schools were again opened in Riga.



The Yanka Kupala memorial plaque built into the wall of the Belarusan Secondary School named after him in Riga

For a long time a well-known Belarusan and Latvian artist and art collector Vjačka Cielieš was the school Head Master. Today Hanna Ivane, who originates from the Miadziel region of Belarus, is the Head Mistress of the school. In 2011 it was named after Janka Kupala. In March 2013 a commemorative plaque in poet's honor was set on the school building with participation of the Minister of Cultural Affairs of Belarus Barys Sviatloŭ and also Janka Kupala's museum was opened.

Then from 1993 the Cultural-Educational Fellowship *Uzdym* as well as the Belarusan Sunday School operated in Daŭgaŭpils. In 1996 The International Fund of Yanka Kupala's Comradeship was created. However, in contemporary Latvian school textbooks the Belarusans of Latgalia are barely acknowledged.

It is also worth mentioning that Belarusan Catholics continue to make pilgrimages to the Basilica of Aglona[1] to venerate the Icon of Aglona

[1] Aglona is a village in Aglona municipality, Latvia. It is located 40 kilometers northeast of the city of Daŭgaŭpils. Aglona is famous in Latvia and beyond for its basilica — the most important Catholic church in the country — which was once visited by Pope John Paul II, and which attracts thousands of pilgrims every year on the day of the Assumption of Mary (15 August). Aglona (Aglyuna in Latgalian) is famous in Latvia and beyond for its basilica — the most important Catholic church in the country. The church and monastery were founded by the Dominican fathers in 1700. The original wooden church and monastery were razed in the 1760s and construction for a new church was begun



Viačka Cielieš outside the Belarusan Secondary School named after Yanka Kupala in Riga, 2013



Belarusan pilgrims in Aglona, August 2007

Mother of God. Aglona is a small town in Latvia situated in the suburbs of Daŭgaŭpils. The glorious baroque cathedral was built there by the Dominicans in 1700, the Aglona Mother of God festival is celebrated there each year on August 15.

In 2007 the Catholics from the Alena and Symon parish in Minsk before going to Aglona first visited the Cathedral of the Ascension of the Lady Mary in Daŭgaŭpils, where Father Yan Zavalnyuk from the Red Cathedral in Minsk once worked. In this way we see that the cultural and religious connections of the Belarusans from Latvia and the Trans-Dzvina region, in particular, are gradually extending.

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in 1768 and completed by 1800 when it was consecrated. The historic icon of the Aglona Mother of God is considered miraculous and has long been an object of veneration. Its dates to the 17th century and its authorship is unknown.

The Republic of Pskoŭ

The Kryvičy first came to the territory of today's Pskoŭ 'oblast' (province) in the 7–8th centuries and settled on the southern shores of Lake Chudskoe[1]. For a long time they lived in close contact with the local Finno-Ugric tribes, and gradually formed a separate branch of the original Kryvičy tribe — as the Kryvičy of Pskoŭ, which could be recognized by a special kind of women's jewelry. The Kryvičy of Pskoŭ were first mentioned in 859 in ***The Tale of Bygone Years***[2]**, it gives a description of their joint campaign against Byzantium together with the troops of the Knyazes Oleg and Igor of Kiev. In 862 this chronicle mentioned a Varangian called Truvor, who lived among the Kryvičy of Pskoŭ in an ancient settlement** ***(bel. гарадзішча)*****,**



One of the Western towers of the Izborsk citadel «Vyška»

[1] Lake Peipus is the biggest transboundary lake in Europe on the border between Estonia (part of European Union) and Russia. The lake is the fifth largest in Europe after Lake Ladoga and Lake Onega in Russia north of St. Petersburg, Lake Vänern in Sweden, and Lake Saimaa in Finland.

The lake is used for fishing and recreation, but suffered from some environmental degradation from Soviet era agriculture. Some 30 rivers and streams discharge into Lake Peipus. The largest rivers are Emajõgi and Velikaya River. The lake is drained by the Narva River.

In 1242, the lake was the site of the Battle on the Ice between the Teutonic Knights and Noŭharadians under Alexander Nevsky.

[2] Saint Nestor the Chronicler (c. 1056 — c. 1114, in Kiev) was the reputed author of the Primary Chronicle (the earliest East Slavic chronicle).

called in his honor Truvor's Settlement. Much later, in 1329, a hill fort (stone castle) was built there which still survives today. The city of Izborsk sprang up around it, by the late 14th — early 15th centuries numerous trade and production areas developed there.

The city settlement of Pskoŭ arose in the 8th century on a high rock at the confluence of the Velikaya and the Pskava rivers. Recently, in the historic part of the city archeologists found the remains of numerous sacrificial burials from the pre-Christianity era. They were laid out in rows one beside the other. The burials were marked by an oval ring of stones covered with clear river sand. Next to them lay the sacrificed skeletons of horses. This suggested that the city was a major religious centre in the territory of Kryvičy.

Pskoŭ was first mentioned in the chronicles in 903. From the 10th century it formed part of 'Kievan Rus' and from the 12th century — of the



Daumont city after archeological excavation

Noŭharad[1] statehood. In 1240 the city was captured by the Crusaders. However, in 1242 it was liberated by the army of Knyaz Alexander Nevsky[2] of Noŭharad.

The most ancient part of the city was the area around the church, which first had wooden, then stone fortifications and was called the Kremlin, or Krom(a) of Pskoŭ. The ground plan is an irregular polygon, surrounded by grey limestone walls with towers. The major towers were called Kutyakroma and Smerdzya. By the middle of the 13th century a southern part of the Kroma stone wall was erected and was called Pershy, or Persi. The wall overlooked the Velikaya River, where the fortifications of the other city blocks stood.

The remains of the first city dwellings dug out by the archeologists appeared to be 3 by 3,5 m four cornered houses sunk 30–40 centimeters

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[1] The Noŭharad Republic was a large medieval Russian state which stretched from the Baltic Sea to the Ural Mountains between the 12th and 15th centuries, centred on the city of Noŭharad. The name «feudal republic» has been frequently used in the Soviet-era scholarship, where it was often used by Marxist scholars to place the Noŭharadian Republic within the Marxist historiographic periodization (slavery — feudalism — capitalism — socialism — communism). Many scholars today, however, question whether or not Russia ever really had a feudal political system parallel to that of the medieval West. The term «Feudal Republic» was never used by the Noŭharadians themselves (indeed, feudalism is a seventeenth-century scholarly term); rather they referred to their city-state as «His Majesty (or Sovereign) Lord Noŭharad the Great», or more often as «Lord Noŭharad the Great». The entire region — the city and its vast hinterlands — was known as The Noŭharadian Land.

Originally Noŭharad was the capital of Rus' until 882 when Oleg transferred the capital to Kiev. Since that time and up until 1019–1020 Noŭharad was a part of Kievan Rus'. Noŭharad Princes were appointed by the Grand Prince of Kiev (usually one of the elder sons). Noŭharad was sort of a spiritual center as by the legend it was the first city of Rus'. Remarkably, to this day Noŭharad still possesses the relics of the old traditional beliefs that preceded Christianity and are now part of the long forgotten history.

[2] Alexander Nevsky (30 May, 1220 — 14 November, 1263, proclaimed «Saint» of the Russian Orthodox Church by Metropolite Macariy in 1547) was the Prince of Noŭharad and Grand Prince of Vladimir during some of the most trying times in the city's history. Commonly regarded as the key figure of medieval Rus', Alexander was the grandson of Vsevolod the Big Nest and rose to legendary status on account of his military victories over the German and Swedish invaders while employing collaborationist policies towards the powerful Golden Horde.

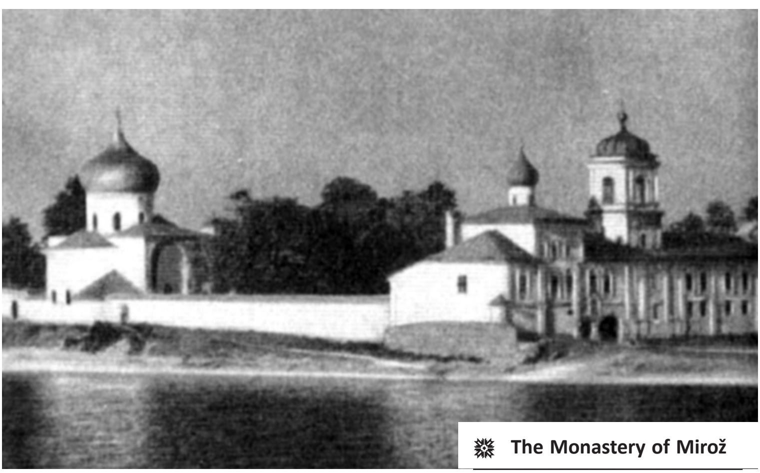


Daumont city, image of the icon of «Candlemas» from the Archbishop Cross chapel

into the earth. The walls of these houses were covered in clay. They were heated by fires surrounded with stones in the centre of the dwelling.

From the 13th century another fortified city block was attached to Kroma, it was called the city of Daumont. In 14th–15th centuries 6 stone temples and palaces were built there. The archeologists found remains of those buildings as well as the traces of the ancient streets which were paved with wooden scaffolds on beams. The pavement was around 3 — 3.15 meters wide and fenced with stripped wooden logs 8–12 centimeters in circumference. A wooden aqueduct was also found. It consisted of two water pipes wrapped in birch bark. At that time the citizens of Pskoŭ lived in wooden houses with 20–25 m^2 of the living space.

The fortified Middle City arose in 1309 after the third circle of city walls was built. By the end of the 14th — beginning of the 15th century the city walls were reinforced; their width increased up to 4 meters and 6



The Monastery of Mirož



View over Krom from the North

towers with loop-holes were constructed. In the second half of the 14th century a new stone cathedral of the Holy Trinity was built and 20 stone churches throughout the city. As the city grew a 4th circle of city walls was made, surrounded by a deep moat. A separate part of the city — Zapskoŭsk — was situated on the opposite bank of the Pskava River.

By the end of the 12th century the Spasa-Mirožsky Cathedral was built across the Velikaya River, which was 1,5 km distance from the main church area. It was the first brick cathedral built in the mixed stone technique, where rows of thin bricks (plinths) were interchanged with stone slabs. Another splendid cathedral to the Blessed Virgin was built in 1310 in the Snetagorsky Monastery. The Cathedral was made from stone slabs and decorated with luxurious fresco paintings.

From 14th century a different building technique was emerging in Pskoŭ which was different from that of Noŭharad. The architects of Pskoŭ created a single domed cubical-shaped cathedral composition with three apses as well as a special type of non pillared cathedral with a system of stepped crypts. At the domed top of the cathedral the flat whitened walls were divided with spatulas into three sections with semi circular arches. An example of this type of architecture is the Assumption church in Melyotovo[1]. Another special feature of the Pskoŭ architecture was high multiple-bay bell tower.

Later, in 16 and 17th centuries large, several storied merchant houses with 2 meter thick walls were built in Pskoŭ. These houses had stairs,

[1] Melyotovo is a village in Karamyshevsk volost of the Pskoŭ region and location of The Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (built in 1461–1462 — painted in 1465), The village is also home to Pskoŭ branch of the State Historical and Architectural Museum-Reserve. Restored in1959–1968 by architects Semenov and Rahmanina.

niches, hiding places and passages in their walls. Window openings were made in the form of embrasures; forged shutters and grates were used to close them. In the inner yard the houses had high porches on arched pillars (an example of this is the mansion house of the Pogankins' built around 1645). The architects of Pskoŭ were also hired to work in different cities, including Moscow.



Today in Pskoŭ one can buy vodka named «Daumont»

In 14–15th centuries the Pskoŭ painting school was flourishing as well. Paintings were characterized by the elevated expressiveness of images, by the increased attention to highlights and by the pronounced brush strokes. This was the technique used in the frescos of the Cathedral of The Blessed Virgin and the Assumption church. The unique icons of *The Mother of God* and *Parasceva Pyatnitsa*, *Warwara* and *Uliana* were created in Pskoŭ in the second half of the 14th century.



Zapskovie's Church of St. Kozma and Demian

In 15th century the famous Pskovo-Pechersky monastery[1] was built in the locality of Pechora,

[1] Pskovo-Pechersky Monastery or The Pskovo-Pechersky Dormition Monastery or Pskov-Caves Dormition Monastery is a Russian Orthodox male monastery, located in Pechory, Pskoŭ Oblast in Russia, just a few kilometers from the Estonian border.

The monastery was founded in the mid-15th century, when the first hermits settled in local caves. The first cave Church of the Dormition of the Theotokos was built in 1473 (its modern facade was constructed in the 18th century).



A view of the Citadel in Pechory

which also played a defensive role. In 1473 the first underground cave church of the Assumption was built. In the 16th century a commercial-production area was formed around the monastery, and together with the monastery it was surrounded by a stone wall with 9 towers. The entrance was through the Saints Gate under a tower. The underground caves were about 200 meters in length. In the 16th century a multi spanned, dual tiered bell tower with clock was built in the monastery. In the 16–17th centuries another 4 churches were built there, which still survive to day.

In 1465 a fifth circle of walls was erected around Pskoŭ. The city had seven gates; two of them were in the Zapskovie part, where trading areas with settlements behind the city walls sprang up. Churches were built in the centres of these settlements which were also used as arms storages.



The Coat of Arms of Pskoŭ

Since the fall of the Soviet Union the monastery has flourished. Currently the monastic community numbers over 90. In 2003 the monastery marked the 530th anniversary of its existence.

In the 16th century the city walls reached 9 kilometers in length and had 37 towers. The Gremyachaya Tower, built in 1524, was the most strongly fortified of all.

The State of Pskoŭ was not big territorially. Situated along the Velikaya and the Narova Rivers, it was about 300 km from the North to the South and 100 km wide. Apart from the rivers, there were two big lakes — Chudskoe and Pskovskoe.

The highest legislative body was the Peoples Veche. Its role was to elect one burgomaster and later (from the year 1420) two burgomasters, and other dignitaries like wardens and constables. The executive body (called the rada) was headed by a specifically invited Knyaz (a foreign mercenary), he was responsible for military forces and was paid in money and comestibles. They had a judicial body as well (which was called gaspoda); its members were elected from the boyars.

Pskoŭ society consisted of boyars, which were not exceedingly rich and rather belonged to middle class; merchants, craftsmen, and free peasants. Poorer peasants rented land. However, Pskoŭ society did not have serfs — kholops[1] — as in Russia.

Knyaz Daumont[2] did a lot to make Pskoŭ independent from Noŭharad. This Knyaz coming from Nalshansk (Nalšia) killed Knyaz Mindoug[3], the founder of the Great Duchy of Lithuania, in 1263. In 1265 he fled to Pskoŭ together with his troop of 300 warriors after being threatened by the Voišalk (Mindoug's son) army. In 1266 Knyaz Daumont was baptized and took the Christian name of Tsimafei, and only then he was elected to be Knyaz of Pskoŭ. For a long time he fought against the Crusaders and against Polatsk; he even killed the Polatsk Knyaz Gerden. After his death he was canonized as Saint Tsimafei — the defender of Pskoŭ, his sword is regarded as symbol of independence.

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[1] Kholops were feudally dependent people in Russia between the 10th and early 18th centuries. Their legal status was close to that of slaves.

[2] Daumantas, later Dovmont (c. 1240? — May 17, 1299) was a Lithuanian princeling best remembered as a military leader of the Pskoŭ Republic between 1266 and 1299. During his term in office, Pskoŭ became de facto independent from Noŭharad. Until 1265, Daumantas was Duke of Nalšia, a northern province of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and was an ally of King Mindoug.

[3] Mindoug (ca. 1200 — 12 September, 1263) was the first known Grand Duke of Lithuania and the only King of Lithuania.



A bottle of «Nevelskaya» Vodka, with the Coat of Arms of Nevel and Pahonia on the label

During Gedimin's[1] reign the intention was to make Pskoŭ fully independent from Noŭharad, which is why relations with the Great Duchy of Lithuania were much improved. Davyd of Hrodna[2], Gedemin's son-in-law, actively helped Pskoŭ. In 1323 when the Crusaders besieged Pskoŭ, he fought them off and destroyed their battering-rams.

In 1341 the Pskoŭ's citizens asked Alhierd[3] of the GDL for support and he came to their rescue together with Keistut. When Alhierd's son Andrei was christened he was elected to be Knyaz of Pskoŭ (1342–1345). His deputy, Yuri Vitaŭtavič, was also from the Great Duchy of Lithuania. In 1342, when Pskoŭ fought against the Crusaders, Lubka — the son of the Polatsk' Knyaz Voin — was killed.

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[1] Gedimin (ca. 1275 — winter 1341) was the monarch of medieval Grand Duchy of Lithuania. He was the ruler of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in 1316–1341, which chiefly meant monarch of Lithuanians and much of Rus'.

[2] David (killed in 1327) was a castellan of Hrodna and one of the most famous warleaders of Gedimin, Grand Duke of Lithuania. He might have been the son of Daumantas of Pskoŭ and great grandson of Alexander Nevsky. Maciej Stryjkowski claims that David was married to one of the daughters of Gedimin. He seems to have been a middleman between the pagan Gedimin and the Christian princes of the Rurikid family and frequently led into battle the united Lithuanian-Ruthenian armies.

[3] Alhierd (Olgierd) (c. 1296 — May 1377) was a monarch of medieval Lithuania. Algirdas ruled the Grand Duchy of Lithuania from 1345 to 1377, which chiefly meant monarch of Lithuanians and Ruthenians. With the help of his brother Keistut, who defended western border of Duchy, he created a vast empire stretching from the Baltics to the Black Sea and reaching within fifty miles of Moscow.

In 1348, after signing the Treaty of Bolotovo[1] with Noŭharad, the State of Pskoŭ gained full independence. However, the religious power remained in the hands of Noŭharad's Pope, who once in three years came to Pskoŭ to preside over the ecclesiastic court.

In the 15th century the economy of Pskoŭ was on the rise. The peasantry grew a lot of rye, as well as wheat, oats and barley. They gathered good harvests of cabbages, onions and turnips in their gardens. Flax from Pskoŭ was exported to the Baltic countries. Large vessels (*bel. учаны)* were being built there and fishing was being actively developed. Production of local craftsmen was in demand. They made clothes, metals goods, dressed animal skins, brewed malt and had mills to grind flour. Pskoŭ's masons were hired to work in Moscovia and other countries of Eastern Europe. Pskoŭ was also famous for making church bells. They actively traded with their neighbors: the Tsver State, Noŭharad, Ryazan, the Great Duchy of Lithuania, as well as with the German countries. In 1424 Pskoŭ minted their first silver coin depicting the lynx which is still on the coat of arms of Pskoŭ.

The chronicles of Pskoŭ written between the 14th and 17th centuries comprising 25 lists still survive today. The most interesting among them was composed in the Troitsk monastery in 1450–1460.

In the 15th century Pskoŭ pursued a pro-Moscovia policy, hoping to remain independent. Pskoŭ supported Moscovia in its wars against Noŭharad and the Great Duchy of Lithuania, particularly in the 1500–1503 war. But politically, it was a wrong move, because Moscovia didn't want to have an independent republic for a friend.

On January 13, 1510 Moscovian troops entered Pskoŭ, the veche bell — a symbol of freedom and independence — was cast down from the bell tower. The 300 richest families from among the merchants and boyars were exiled. They were not allowed to take anything with them apart from what was on them. Thus, children were dressed in two or three fur coats; gold coins were hidden in women's underwear. Reminiscent of the dispossession of the Kulaks carried out under Stalin!

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[1] The Noŭharad boyars formally recognized Pskoŭ's independence in the Treaty of Bolotovo (1348), relinquising their right to appoint the posadniks of Pskoŭ. The city of Pskoŭ remained dependent on Noŭharad only in ecclesiastical matters until 1589, when a separate bishopric of Pskoŭ was created and the archbishops of Noŭharad dropped Pskoŭ from their title and were created «Archbishops of Noŭharad the Great and Velikie Luki».

The Pskoŭ revival took place at the end of the 18th century, when in 1772, after the first partition of the Rzecz Pospolita, the Pskoŭ province became a hubernia with the centre in Achopka and was included into the Belarusan general-hubernia. Up until 1775 it consisted of the following provinces: Viciebsk, Vyalikiya Luki, Dzvinsk, Polatsk and Pskoŭ.

In 1776 the Polatsk hubernia was cut off from the Pskoŭ hubernia and Pskoŭ was made the capital of the remaining part, which was a hubernian city until 1927.

In 1918 Pskoŭ and the Pskoŭ region were destined to become a place where the most powerful and active military force of the independent Belarusan Peoples Republic was born — the army formation of Stanislaŭ Bulak-Balakhovič. In early September 1918 near the Karamyshava Station (which is 20 km to the East of Pskoŭ) the regiment of Stanislaŭ Bulak-Balakhovič deserted to the Southern branch of the White Army[1]. Being a captain of cavalry he was appointed to be an officer commanding a separate horse detachment. After the Germans and the Whites retired from Pskoŭ to Estonia on November 26, 1918 he fought in the Pyachora region, which is to the South of Lake Pskoŭ.



A postcard published to the birthday of Bulak-Balakhovič

On December 25, 1918 the units of the Northern Army came under command of the independent country of Estonia. The Army was reorganized into the North-Western corpus, and the operational forces were divided into two groups. One of these groups fought in Narva region, the other was fighting and moving in the direction of Pskoŭ. Bulak-Balakhovič was in the

[1] The Whites comprised some of the politico-military Russian forces who unsuccessfully fought the Bolsheviks after the October Revolution and later the Red Army in the Russian Civil War (1917–23).

Pskoŭ group. In January 1919 he gained the rank of Lieutenant Colonel for liberating Tartu from the Bolsheviks.

On May 15, 1919 Bulak-Balakhovič's regiment and other troops under his command took the city of Gdou, for which he received the rank of Colonel. Later his regiment took part in the Pskoŭ battle and on May 25, 1919 the city of Pskoŭ was taken by the Estonian Army and the Whites. For the victory over Pskoŭ Bulak-Balakhovič was appointed to be a commander of Pskoŭ region. For the battle in Pskoŭ the Commander of the North-Western Army Lt. Gen. Radyanka awarded him with the rank of Major General and from the units reporting to him Bulak-Balakhovič formed a separate mixed regiment.

After the North-Western Army's defeat near St.Petersburg, Major General Bulak-Balakhovič fought in the Pskoŭ region and Estonia. But a conflict between the Belarusan born Bulak-Balakhovič, and the Russian monarchists was inevitable and as a result of it Bulak-Balakhovič once arrested the Russian General Yudenich.

When the possibility of a peace treaty between Estonia and the Soviet Russia became real, Bulak-Balakhovič, the General, remembering about his Belarusan origin, opted for his regiment to go under the command of the BNR Government. His regiment numbered 1,200 servicemen, and among them 75% of the soldiers, 50% of the officers were Belarusan. His regiment took the Belarusan National White-Red-White flag for their symbol and the Belarus national coat of arms *Pahonia* [1] became their cap badge. Bulak-Balakhovič gained permission from the Estonian government to recruit volunteers from the other regiments of the later North-Western Army (Belarusan and Polish preferably) into his platoon.

Bulak-Balakhovič addressed the military-diplomatic mission of the BNR in Estonia and Latvia, headed by Colonel Kanstantin Jezavitaŭ in Riga, because on January 22, 1920 his regiment had joined the BNR. On February 8, 1920, Colonel Jezavitaŭ officially addressed Josef Pilsudski, the Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Army, to get permission for the transfer of Bulak-Balakhovič's regiment from Estonia to Belarus. With that Pskoŭ's page in Bulak-Balakhovič's military activity was closed.

In 1924, when Viciebsk hubernia became part of the Belarus Soviet Socialist Republic, the Veliž, Nevel and Sebež regions were separated from it and passed to the Pskoŭ in the Russian Federation. This is despite the fact that some regions, for example that of Veliž, had up to 72% of the Belarusan

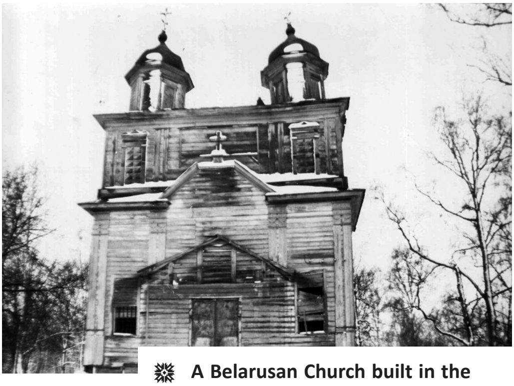
[1] chaser

population. In September 1928 the Belarusan government proposed to pass the regions of Veliž, Nevel and Sebež back to Belarus, it was referring to the fact that earlier, in 1926, the Leningrad oblast organization of the All Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks requested Veliž region join the Belarus Soviet Socialist Republic.

There is evidence that at the time of the Khrushchev Thaw the Executive Committee of Nevel officially lobbied the Supreme Soviets of the BSSR with the proposal to be rejoined with Belarus. However, the situation was never satisfactorily resolved.

In the village of Staiki, which is in the Nevel region, there is an 18th century wooden church which is derelict. It is hoped that the combined efforts of Belarusan and Russian conservators will be able to restore this historic building.

Recently, the historic-architectural centre of Pskoŭ together with the nature-historic object of Izborsk under the common nomination of «Pskoŭ — The Great» were preliminarily included in the World Cultural Heritage. List of the contemporary objects of UNESCO has been registered in the World Heritage Centre.



A Belarusan Church built in the village of Staiki in the 18th century. Nevel region. Photo taken in 1993

The Grand Duchy of Tsver

During the long years of the Communist era Soviet historians worked hard to make the Belarusan people believe that their nation never had a history of statehood and that the first Belarusan country appeared in Smalensk on January 1, 1919 and was called the Soviet Socialist Republic of Belarus.
They were also trying to avoid mentioning the territorial problem of this new republic, whose ethnic borders had only existed for a couple of weeks, and that not long after, more than half of its territory was taken from it for the sake of other neighboring states to suit political purpose.
Now, many years later, every schoolchild knows about our state hiding its roots in ancient history — the Grand Polatsk Duchy, in the Middle Ages — the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and in 20th century — the Belarus People's Republic. However, if we refer to the ethnographical maps of Belarus, which were printed at the beginning of the 20th century in the publishing houses of Russia, Germany and other countries, we will see that the territory of Belarus extended further above



The source of the river Volga near the village of Volgaverkhovie to the West of the Ostashkovsky (Astaškaŭski) region of Tsver oblast

the eastern boarders of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. It is interesting to know the reasons why the Belarusans managed to get that far and how they had survived there with their language, traditions and costumes until the First World War. It is even more surprising because from the 16th century the Muscovites, who had vast experience in how to assimilate conquered nations, gradually became the main ruling power in these lands. For example, where are now those numerous Finno-Ugric and Turkic tribes, whose people were also taken and incorporated into the Muscovite state in the 14–16th centuries?

The integrity of Belarusan language and culture was maintained because Belarusans opposed assimilation more strongly than the others. They already had advanced cultural and political achievements and had built not one but many different states throughout the ages. Descendents of only one of the Belarusan tribes — the Kryvičy (last mentioned in the Chronicles in the 12th century) in the 14–15th centuries had four independent states: The Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Žamojć and Russia (GDL); the Grand Duchy of Smalensk; the Grand Duchy of Tsver; and the Republic of Pskoŭ. These states although fighting against each other at times, most often battled together against their common enemies such as the Crusaders, the Tartars, and later, against the Muscovites, who were gradually becoming more powerful and stronger.

The least known of these Kryvičy states was the Grand Duchy of Tsver. This state appeared in the 13th century on the territories populated by the Kryvičy of Smalensk. It existed right up to the end of the 15th century and during the 13th and 14th centuries it was the main competitor of Moscovia.

The Tsver Region is located in the central part of the East European Plain. The Volga River — the biggest in Europe — runs through its territory and Lake Seliger shines and sparkles like an enormous sapphire there.

Monument to Afanasiy Nikitin. Tsver





Nilo-Slupskaya (Nilo-Stolobny) ashram monastery on Slupsk Island. Stolobny Island is an island on Lake Seliger in the Tsver Oblast of Russia, about 10 km (6.2 mi) north of the town of Ostashkov. The island is the home of the Nilov Monastery, which was founded by Saint Nilus in 1594, and previously welcomed up to 40,000 pilgrims each year. Most of the buildings of the monastery were built in the 18th and 19th centuries in a neoclassical style. Today the monastery complex remains one of the most impressive ensembles of Neoclassical architecture in Eastern Europe. Some of its churches date back to the 17th century. A graceful embankment was completed by 1812, and a large cathedral was built in 1821–1825. The construction of the causeway to the island was completed in 1812. The Nilov Monastery was one of the largest and wealthiest monasteries in the Russian Empire

The city of Tsver sprang up in 12th century (its founding date is considered to be 1181) and first belonged to Noŭharad. From 1209 it fell under the jurisdiction of the principality of Vladzimir-Suzdal. It flourished between the 13th and 15th centuries, when it became a major cultural and craft centre. Trade was also important, the merchants of Tsver traded with the cities of the Baltics, the Caucasus, and Central Asia[1] and the Near East[2].

[1] Central Asia is a core region of the Asian continent from the Caspian Sea in the west, China in the east, Afghanistan in the south, and Russia in the north. It is also sometimes being referred to as Middle Asia, Inner Asia, Turkestan, and, colloquially, «the 'stans» (the ending in the countries' names within the region) and is within the scope of the wider Eurasian continent.

[2] The Near East is a geographical term that covers different countries for archeologists and historians, on the one hand, and for political scientists, economists, and journalists, on the other. The term originally applied to the Balkan states in Eastern Europe, but now generally describes the countries of Western Asia between the Mediterranean Sea and Iran, especially in historical contexts.



Rebellion in Tsver against the tartaric ambassador Chalkan in 1327. Miniature from the Chronicles. 16th century

Afanasy Nikitin[1] was the most famous merchant from Tsver. In 1466–1472 he was the first European to travel to India. He was highly educated and knew the Arabian, Tatarian and Persian languages.

He set out down the river Volga and reached the city of Derbent. He continued on to Baku and Persia. From Persia he managed to reach the Arabian port of Armus, and then finally he reached India by sea. He traveled back through Persia and the city of Trapesund, a port on the Black Sea. Having crossed the Black Sea he went ashore in the Crimea, to the city of Kafa (today's Feodosia).

Having made the long trip from the Crimea, he was only a few miles from home when he died near Smalensk in the autumn of 1472. His renown was such that in 1955 his countrymen erected a bronze and granite monument in his honor in Tsver. The account of his travels ***The Journey beyond Three Seas*** has been reprinted many times.

In the beginning of the 13th century Tsver was the centre of the Pereyaslavl-Zalessky Principality. But after Vladzimir-Suzdal's lands were defeated by the Mongol-Tatars, in 1247 Tsver gained independence and the city became the capital of the region during the reign of Knyaz Yaroslav Yaroslavich[2], the brother of Alexander Nevsky.

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[1] Afanasy Nikitin (?–1472) was a Russian merchant and one of the first Europeans (after Niccolò de' Conti) to travel to and document his visit to India. He described his trip in a narrative known as the The Journey Beyond Three Seas (Rus: Khozhdeniye za tri morya).

[2] Yaroslav III Yaroslavich (1220–1271) was the first Prince of Tsver and the tenth Grand Prince of Vladimir from 1264 to 1271. Yaroslav and his son Mikhail Yaroslavich presided over Tsver's transformation from a sleepy village into one of the greatest centres of power in medieval Russia. All the later dukes of Tsver descended from Yaroslav Yaroslavich. He was a son of Yaroslav II and younger brother of Alexander Nevsky. In 1247, while still a minor, he received from his uncle the town of Tsver.

From 1264 Yaroslav Yaroslavich became the Great Knyaz of Vladimir Duchy[1]. The next year an Episcopalian cathedral was opened in Tsver, its head was Bishop Semion from Polatsk. Another Bishop of Tsver was Andrei; the son of Gerden, his magistrature (episcopature) lasted from 1289 to 1316.

The capital of a new country had to have a stone cathedral. The foundations were laid in 1285 by Knyaz Mikhail Yaroslavich[2], his mother Princess Aksinia and Bishop Simeon. As construction would take a long time, a temporary wooden church was built, which was used until the cathedral was finished. In 1290 the cathedral was consecrated as The Church of the Transfiguration by Bishop Andrei[3].



The Church of the Virgin Birth in the village of Garodnya, Kanokovka region, Tsver oblast. It was built in the center of the ancient city of Vyartyazin in the second half of the 14th century

The cathedral shared its name with the famous Transfiguration church[4] built by Euphrosine Po-

[1] In 1360 the highest dignity among Russian princes was that of Grand Prince of Vladimir. For a long time the Principality was a vassal of the Mongolian Golden Horde. And it was in 'the gift' of the Khan.

[2] Mikhail Yaroslavich (1271 — November 22, 1318), also known as Michael of Tsver or Michael the Saint, was a Prince of Tsver (from 1285) who ruled as Grand Prince of Vladimir from 1304 until 1314 and again from 1315–1318. He is counted among the saints of the Russian Orthodox Church.

[3] In 1285–1290s the Cathedral of the Transfiguration was erected in the Kremlin instead of the wooden Churches of Kozma and Damian. The grandiose stone temple marked the leading role of Tsver in «gathering together» Russian lands.

[4] Transfiguration Church of the St. Euphrosine monastery in Polatsk, Belarus, is a well-preserved monument of Pre-Mongol Rus' architecture. Built in the 12th century, with some additions from the 17th through 19th centuries, it is one of the main touristic attractions of the city.

latskaya[1] in the 12th century in Polatsk. In two years the cathedral was completed and painted with frescos and it became the mother church of the new country. Shortly after, two smaller churches were built nearby and in 1323 Bishop Andrei was buried in one of them. In 1399 Knyaz Mikhail Alexandrovich made major renovations to the cathedral.

The Transfiguration Church was the first stone cathedral on the territory of North-Eastern Rus' after the Tatars were overthrown in 1238. Therefore, Tsver was ahead of Moscow in stone constructional development. The cathedral was built from white stone and was possibly decorated with fretwork — in 1992 on site of the cathedral a piece of the fretted stone in the form of a plait was found. In the 17th century the cathedral was rebuilt several times, but in 1935 it was finally demolished by the Bolsheviks. This came about in 1930 when a new campaign to separate church from state began in Tsver. Almost all belfries were demolished by the will of the municipal authorities as well as many churches, fine examples of Russian architecture of the 17–19th centuries. The Cathedral of the Transfiguration of the Saviour was blown up on the night of April 4, 1935.

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[1] Euphrosine (sometimes spelled Eŭfrasińnia, Efrasinnia) of Polatsk (1110–1173) was the granddaughter of a prince of Polatsk, Vseslav.

She refused all proposals of marriage and, without her parents' knowledge, ran away to the convent of which her aunt was the abbess and became a nun. Later she founded her own convent. She spent her time copying books, and the money she thus earned she distributed amongst the poor. She also built two churches, and one, the church of The Holy Saviour, still stands today and is considered to be the most precious monument of early Belarusan architecture. Towards the end of her life, she undertook a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, where she died sometime after 1167. Her body, after the conquest of Jerusalem by Saladin in 1187, was carried by the monks to Kiev and deposited there in the Monastery of the Caves. It was only in 1910 that the relics of the saint were brought back to her native town of Polatsk.

Euphrosine is the only East Slav virgin saint. The cross of Saint Euphrosine was a splendid gem-studded cross created at her behest by a local master, Łasar Bohša (Лазар Богша). The famous six-armed golden cross was decorated with enamels and precious stones and presented by her to the church of the Holy Saviour in 1161. Of exquisite beauty, the relic survived centuries of turbulence until World War II, when it mysteriously disappeared during the evacuation of the museum in 1941. Most probably it was stolen by a Soviet soldier, or possibly by a German. In its attempts to trace the whereabouts of this treasure, the government of the Republic of Belarus has looked virtually everywhere, examining even private collections in the United States.

Another stone church was started in Tsver in 1323. It was in the monastery of St. Fedor. The cathedral dedicated to the Saint Fedor was built by hegumen[1] of the monastery of Ivan Tsaregradzets. This was also a white stone cathedral, it was demolished in 1773. During excavations archeologists found a lot of pieces of the white stone blocks (one of them was carved) and large sized bricks on site of the cathedral.

In the 14th century the cathedral of Archangel Mikhail stood on the bank of the Volga River in Tsver. But it is not known whether it was built of stone or wood. Researchers think that it was built by Mikhail Shaten, the Captain of Tsver Territorial Army (irregulars); later on captains of the Tsver Army were buried in it.

In 1369 Knyaz Mikhail Alexandrovich reinforced the city of Tsver with a wooden Kremlin and in 1372 surrounded it with a moat. Recently a soil core of approximately from 4 up to 5.6 cm was taken from the Tsver Kremlin and was found to contain organic matter and traces of leather articles which were excellently preserved.

Between the 13th and 15th centuries the art of painting flourished in Tsver and local artists developed their own school of painting. They are best known for icons and miniature paintings for manuscripts.

Tsver is also renowned for written manuscripts, some of them still surviving today. ***The chronicle of Georgiy Amartol*** is the best known among them.



Boar spear of the Great Prince Boris Alexandrovich (bel. Baris Aliaksandravič)

The biggest cities of the Grand Dutchy of Tsver were: Kashin, Ksnyatin, Zubtsov, Starytsa (white building stone was quarried there for construction), Kholm, Mikulin and Dorogobuzh. On its boarder with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Noŭharad the Great, and Moscovia stood the town of

[1] Hegumen is the title for the head of a monastery of the Eastern Orthodox Church or Eastern Catholic Churches, similar to the one of abbot. The term means «the one who is in charge», «the leader» in Greek.

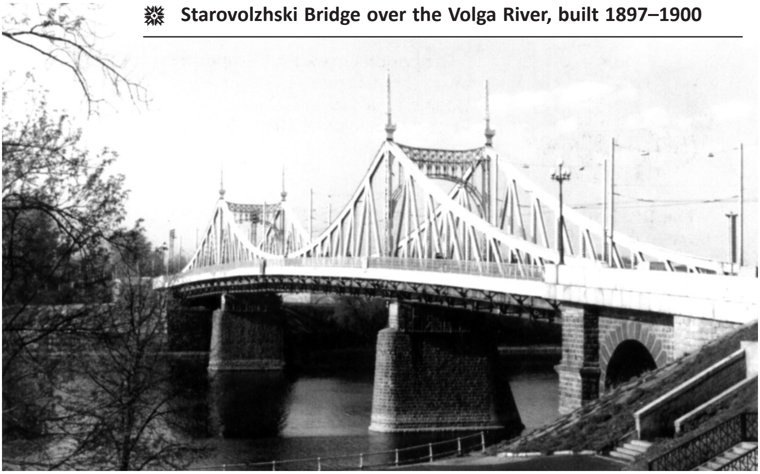
Rzhev; in 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries the presence there of Belarusans was identified on ethnographic maps. For a definite period of time Rzhev simultaneously belonged to the GDL and Noŭharad, and its citizens divided their tax payments between the two.

In the 14th century the struggle for supremacy between the Tsver and Moscovia Knyazes for the throne of the Duchy of Vladimir was increasing. One of the contemporary Russian historians wrote that the Knyazes of Tsver had advantages in their presidency, personal heroism, legal and moral means. However, the Knyazes of Moscovia had more money and could boast the ability to adapt to circumstances.



The Holy Trinity, White Trinity Church in Tsver, architectural monument, 16th century

Starovolzhski Bridge over the Volga River, built 1897–1900



At that time Tsver was on good terms with the GDL. In 1320 Gedimin's daughter Maria married Mikhail — the Knyaz of Tsver; Keistut's[1] daughter married Knyaz Ivan Mikhailovich of Tsver shortly after. Tsver's troops frequently fought alongside the troops of the GDL against the Crusaders.

Moscovia in their battle against Tsver always used the support of Golden Horde[2] and Tatarian troops. Yury Mikhailovich, Knyaz of Moscovia, killed his relative Mikhail of Tsver, who fought on the side of Horde troops, but shortly after was killed himself by son of Mikhail of Tsver.

According to Wikipedia:

Mikhail did manage to finally take control of the city in 1316 with Mongol aid, but the following year Uzbeg Khan gave the yarlik, or patent of office, of the Grand Prince of Vladimir to Yury, who also married Uzbeg's sister.

After granting Yury the yarlyk, or patent of office, the Khan sent his army under the Mongol general Kavgadii to help Yuri in his struggle with Mikhail Yaroslavich. December 22, 1317 Mikhail defeated Yuri at a village called Bortenevo (40 km from Tsver). Mikhail captured Yuri's wife, who was the Khan's sister. When she died in Mikhail's custody, he was blamed for her murder, although it seems unlikely that he would have killed her knowing how much it would hurt him politically for such little gain. He released Kagadii, who returned to Sarai, and accused Mikhail of murdering the Khan's sister, withholding tribute and warring against his Mongol overlord. As a result, Mikhail was summoned to the Horde by the Khan and executed on November 22, 1318.

Things came to a head in 1327 under Alexander — when Tsver took the lead in rebellion against Horde. In the city a tartaric envoy was killed along with his convoy. Then, the Khan of the Golden Horde ordered the Moscovian Knyaz Ivan Kalita[3] (brother of murdered Yuri of Moscow) to punish the citizens of Tsver. Kalita took charge of the tatarian army, he

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[1] Keistut (born ca. 1297, died on August 3 or August 15, 1382, in Kreva) was monarch of medieval Lithuania. He was the Duke of Trakai and governed the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, 1342–1382, together with his brother Algirdas (until 1377), and with his nephew Jagaila (until 1381). He ruled over the Lithuanians and Ruthenians.

[2] The Golden Horde is an East Slavic designation for the Mongol — later Turkicized — Muslim khanate established in the western part of the Mongol Empire after the Mongol invasion of Rus' in the 1240s: present-day Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Cossackhstan, and the Caucasus.

[3] Ivan Kalita inherited the throne of Muscovy in 1325. The word 'kalita' means 'Moneybag'.

exterminated the rebels and completely devastated the Duchy of Tsver: in 1328 in recognition of that he was given the title of the Grand Duke of Muscovy by The Khan. However, Tsver gradually recovered and continued its fight against Moscovia with the support of Grand Duke Alhierd of the GDL, who in 1347 married the princess Juliana of Tsver in his second marriage after his first wife the princess of Viciebsk died. In September 1368 Alhierd provided Tsver with support and set out to conquer Moscow, he besieged it and held the line by its walls until ransom was paid.

In 1370 Dmitry, Knyaz of Moscow and Grand Prince of Vladimir, took up arms against Tsver again. In retaliation Alhierd of the GDL undertook a second campaign against Moscow and on December 6, 1370 unsuccessfully besieged the city.

Alhierd occupied the important principalities of Smalensk and Bransk in the western Russia. Although his relations with the grand dukes of Moscovia were friendly on the whole, as he had married two Orthodox Russian princesses, this did not prevent him from besieging Moscow in 1368 and again in 1372, both times unsuccessfully.

In between the Grand Prince Mikhail II of Tsver, Mikhail Alexandrovich[1] was granted the yarlyk, or patent of office, from the Khan of the Golden

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[1] Mikhail Alexandrovich was Grand Prince of Tsver and briefly held the title of Grand Prince of Vladimir. He was one of only two Tsver princes after 1317 (the other was his father, Aleksandr) to hold the grand princely title, which was almost the exclusive purview of the Muscovite princes.

Mikhail Alexandrovich was the fourth son of Aleksandr Mikhailovich of Tsver. Mikhail grew up in Pskoŭ, where his father had fled after the Tsver Uprising of 1327. He was christened by the Archbishop of Noŭharad, Vasily Kalika, in 1333. Five years later he and his mother were called to Tsver when Aleksandr returned to the city. In 1341 he went to Noŭharad where Archbishop Vasily taught him reading and writing (which would have meant reading the Scriptures). In 1368 he became prince of Tsver.

Mikhail Alexandrovich was among the last princes to seriously threaten Grand Duchy of Moscow for possession of the office of Grand Prince of Vladimir, hoping to unseat Moscow with the aid of his brother-in-law Alhierd, Grand Duke of Lithuania. In 1371, he managed to gain the yarlik, or patent of office, as Grand Prince of Vladimir from the Khan of the Golden Horde, and was accepted as Prince of Noŭharad, an important economic asset for any Russian prince. He seems to have lost power the following year when Alhierd concluded Treaty of Lyubutsk with Dmitri Donskoi of Moscow, but it is not clear who was considered grand prince between 1372 and 1375, at which time Dmitri Donskoi defeated Mikhail.

Horde for the Vladimir Duchy. In 1372 the GDL troops, headed by Vitaŭt (nephew of Alhierd) and Keistut (brother of Alhierd) took the fight to Moscovia again to support their ally.

In 1375 the Moscow Knyaz Dzimitry set out on a crusade to march to Tsver, having mobilized the military troops of the 19 local appanaged[1] princelings. Mikhail, Knyaz of Tsver, defended the city bravely, the siege lasted 5 weeks but the city did not capitulate. Then the invaders in fury sacked other settlements around the city. Under these circumstances Knyaz Mikhail had no option but to negotiate for peace.

In 1385 Vasiliy Mikhailovich, Knyaz of Tsver, married a daughter of Vladzimir Alhierdavich, Knyaz of Kiev, the connections with the Gedimin dynasty had been strengthened again. This also contributed to the fact that in 1386 Jagaila, the son of Grand Duke Alhierd, and Princess Juliana of Tsver became King and Queen of Poland.

In 1430 Grand Duke Vitaŭt, together with the Russian Knyaz Vasiliy Vasilievich, invited Boris Alexandrovich, Knyaz of Tsver, to his coronation. Vitaŭt's guests had been busy for 6 weeks celebrating, but still the coronation didn't take place, because on the way through Poland the Crown was stolen, — Vitaŭt died shortly after. But the connections between knyazes of Tsver and the dynasty of the Gedimins remained strong, because the Princess of Tsver gave Alhierd other sons apart from Jagaila.

The best time for economic and culture development of the State of Tsver was in the first two thirds of the 15th century, when Moscovia had long and exhausting civil wars and their hit and run raids on Tsver stopped.

At the beginning of the 15th century Ivan Mikhailovich, Knyaz of Tsver, was minting his own coinage. The cannon founders of Tsver were widely known as the best all over Rus' — in the middle of the 15th century the name of the famous cannon-founder Mikula Krechetnikov was mentioned in manuscripts.

The last cultural and economic explosion of the state of Tsver was during Knyaz Boris Alexandrovich reign. His personal weapon, dzida, a sort of spear, had a signature showing that it belonged to Knyaz Boris Alexandrovich. Its grip was silver plated and had many engravings with scenes of battles, hunting, and everyday life.

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[1] An apanage or appanage is the grant of an estate, titles, offices, or other things of value to the younger male children of a sovereign, who would otherwise have no inheritance under the system of primogeniture. It was common in much of Europe.

However, the reign of Tsar Ivan III[1] was marked by a stronger Moscovia, the defeat of the Golden Horde and usurpation of Noŭharad lands. Soon attention was focused on Tsver. Here, from the outset, and similar to the situations previously in Noŭharad, Pskoŭ or Ryazan — a «fifth column» was created from boyars bribed by Moscow.

Kazimir, the Grand Knyaz of Lithuania, who was simultaneously King of Poland, did not want to risk conflict in his own lands thereby provided support to neither Noŭharad nor Tsver, and as a result in September 1485 Ivan III's troops besieged Tsver. Shortly after, the bribed boyars took side of Moscow and the Tsver Knyaz Mikhail Borisovich[2], with a relatively small druzhyna (brigade), managed to get to the boarders of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, but his mother, the princess Anastasia[3], was captured and sent to Moscow supposedly into monastery. «This was the end of the Great Duchy of Tsver», wrote a commentator sorrowfully in the short chronicle of Volhyn (Volynsk).

Afterwards, Noŭharad, having lost their last reliable ally in the East, the GDL soon began to suffer major defeats by Moscovia and, eventually,

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[1] Ivan III Vasilevich (22 January 1440, Moscow — 27 October 1505, Moscow), also known as Ivan the Great, was a Grand Prince of Moscow and «Grand Prince of all Russia». Sometimes referred to as the «gatherer of the Russian lands», he tripled the territory of his state, renovated the Moscow Kremlin, and laid the foundations of the Russian state. He was one of the longest-reigning Russian rulers in history.

[2] Mikhail III Borisovich, Grand Prince of Tsver, was the last prince of Tsver. Mikhail was the son of Boris Alexandrovich, Grand Prince of Tsver, and his second wife Anastasia Alexandrovna of Suzdal (1453 — before 1505). He was Grand Prince of Tsver from 1461 to 1485. He married Sophia Olelkovich, princess of Slutsk of Lithuanian origin, in 1471 (she died in 1483), then a granddaughter of Casimir IV Jagiellon, and eventually lost the title when Ivan III of Moscow conquered Tsver in 1485. Ivan the Younger, son of Ivan III the Great, is by some sources counted as prince of Tsver from 1485 to 1490, but may have been without real ruling power.

Mikhail of Tsver went to exile to Kingdom of Poland and Grand Duchy of Lithuania, trying to regain the throne of Tsver, but king Casimir IV Jagiellon rejected.

[3] 1461–1472 Regent Dowager Grand Princess Anastasya Aleksandrovna of Suzdal of Tsver (Russia) After the death of her husband Boris (1399–1461) she was regent for Mikhail III (1453-61-85-1505), the last Grand Prince of Tsver (d. 1483).

in 1513 Smalensk was conquered. Only the battle of Orša[1] temporarily stopped Moscovian aggression until the beginning of the Livonian war[2].

The new Tsar of Moscovia Ivan the Terrible[3] hadn't completely forgotten about Tsver and its citizens, which still cherished in their memories the years when they had been independent from Moscow and enjoyed a period of self rule with close connection to the Jagiellonian dynasty[4].

This independence came to an end in December 1569 when Ivan's troops surrounded Tsver for several days. First they plundered the church (bishop, clergy, ecclesiastical lands and treasure) finishing with the ordinary citizens. Finally they broke into the city again and killed many people including women and children. On the orders of Ivan the Terrible the bodies of captured Germans and Polatskers were cut into pieces and thrown

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[1] The Battle of Orša took place September 8, 1514, fought by the allied forces of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Kingdom of Poland (less than 30,000 troops), under the command of Hetman Konstantin Ostrogski, and the army of Grand Duchy of Moscow under Konyushy («Tsar's Equerry») Ivan Chelyadnin and Knyaz Mikhail Golitsin. The Battle of Orša was part of a long series of Russo-Lithuanian Wars conducted by Russian rulers striving to gather all the lands of former Kievan Rus' under their rule.

The much smaller army of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Poland defeated the Russian forces, capturing their camp and commander.

[2] The Livonian War of 1558–1583 was a lengthy series of wars between the Tsardom of Russia and a variable coalition of Denmark–Norway, Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the Kingdom of Poland, and Sweden for control of medieval Livonia, the territory of the present-day Estonia and Latvia.

[3] Ivan the Terrible (Ivan Groznyi) was Grand Prince of Moscow from 1533 until his death. His long reign saw the conquest of the Khanates of Kazan, Astrakhan, and Siberia, transforming Russia into a multiethnic and multiconfessional state spanning almost one billion acres, approximately 4,046,856 km^2 (1,562,500 sq mi). Ivan oversaw numerous changes in the transition from a medieval nation state to an empire and emerging regional power, and became the first Tsar of a new and more powerful nation.

[4] The Jagiellonian dynasty was a royal dynasty originating from the Lithuanian House of Gediminas dynasty that reigned in Central European countries (present day Lithuania, Belarus, Poland, Ukraine, Latvia, Estonia, parts of Russia (including nowadays Kaliningrad oblast), Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia) between the 14th and 16th century. Members of the dynasty were Grand Dukes of Lithuania 1377–1392 and 1440–1572, kings of Poland 1386–1572, kings of Hungary 1440–1444 and 1490–1526, and kings of Bohemia 1471–1526.

into the icy waters of the Volga. Next they went on to pillage Torzhok[1] and Noŭharad.

However, over the years Tsver survived and by the 18th century it had gradually recovered. From 1775 it was a centre of hubernia.

Despite centuries of assimilation and ethnic cleansing by Ivan the Terrible, in the 19th century a Belarusan presence in some regions of the Tsver hubernia still remained. According to the population census of 1897, 125,000 people were registered as Belarusans; they lived in the Rzhev, Zubtsov and Ostashkov paviets.

The less assimilated Belarusans lived on the banks of the River Tood, or Todd, which flows into the Volga. They preserved the language, costumes and culture of their heritage (and even played the bagpipes!). Those Belarusans of the Privolzhsky district were called Tudaulyany (Тудаўляны) — the word comes from the name of the river Tood. In 1903 they numbered about 45,000 people and despite the years of Stalin's Terror and actions of the Second World War (when Tsver was captured by the Germans) in the mid sixties of the last century the Belarusan national cultural features of Tudaulayny, their language and folklore were still registered by the regional ethnographers.

Meanwhile, the ethnic memory of the Kryvičy tribe was alive all across the territory of Tsver. Conditions were favorable enough to generate a revival. So, the Biežyck region which is in the north-east of the Tsver oblast gave birth to the outstanding scientists and experts in Belarusan language and literature: Ivan Zamotsin and Mikola Baikoŭ.



Ivan Zamotsin

Ivan Ivanavich Zamotsin was born on November 1, 1873 in the village of Kryvulina in the Biežyck paviet of Tsver hubernia into the family of a poor landless peasant. His mother, widowed early in life, moved to St. Petersburg, where she found a job as a maid servant. She was forced by circumstances to send her only beloved son to an orphanage. It later became apparent that he was very gifted

[1] Torzhok is a town in Tsver Oblast, Russia, famous for its folk craft of goldwork embroidery. Population: 48,967 (2002 Census); 49,982 (1989 Census).

in sciences and thanks to the efforts of his mother's employer he was accepted as a student into the Pskoŭ Gymnasium under state sponsorship.

In 1897 Zamotsin graduated from the historic-philological department of St. Petersburg University and in 1922 he moved to Minsk as did many other 'Russian' scientists. He was elected as a Professor of the Russian Historical Literature department of the Minsk University and from 1931 — of the Minsk Pedagogical Institute. At the same time Zamotsin worked at the Institute of Belarusan Culture, and in 1928 he became an Academic at the Academy of Sciences of the BSSR (Belarus Soviet Socialist Republic). In 1929 he was a corresponding member (an associate) of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR.

Having moved to Minsk, Zamotsin started to work hard in the field of Belarusan literature. He was the first to promote the name of Yakub Kolas[1] as a world literary figure and he was also the first to write a critical review of his poems «Novaya Zyamlya» and «Symon Muzyka». Ivan Zamotsin pioneered research into Belarusan literature and laid down the foundation of the theory and history of Belarusan literature science. On April 4, 1938, he was arrested, exiled to Komi, an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, where he died in the prison hospital in 1942.



Mikalai Baikoŭ

Mikalai Yakaulevich Baikoŭ was born on February 22, 1889 into a priest's family in the city of Bieżyck, in Tsver Hubernia. He received his preliminary education in the religious school of Bieżyck, his secondary education in the ecclesiastical seminary of Tsver, and higher education in the Ecclesiastical Academy in Moscow (from which he graduated in 1913).

His first job was at the Ecclesiastical Academy in Minsk. He taught philosophical and pedagogical disciplines. From 1918, when all religions were forbidden, he taught in the

[1] Yakub Kolas (also Jakub Kołas) (November 3 [O.S. October 22], 1882 — August 13, 1956), real name Kanstantsin Mitskievich, was a Belarusan writer, People's Poet of the Belorussian SSR (1926), and member (1928) and vice-president (from 1929) of the Belarusan Academy of Sciences.

Minsk Pedagogical Institute. Throughout his career he held different positions in the field of education.

From 1921 he worked as an academic secretary in the research terminological commission of the People's Commissariat on Education of the BSSR (Belarus Soviet Socialist Republic), in 1922–1928 — in the vocabulary commission of the Inbelkult (the Institute of the Belarusan Culture) and then in the Institute of the Linguistics of the Academy of Sciences of the BSSR. He was widely acknowledged as the author of the theses in the theory and history of literature, in literature critical reviews and in Pedagogy, but he is particularly famous as the compiler of different dictionaries[1].

He used the name of Kryvič and Mikola Kryvič among other pen names in acknowledgment of his origins. Under Stalin's repressions he was arrested and shot in 1946 by the Bolsheviks on suspicion of «national deviation».

After the Second World War the Belarusan presence in Tsver started to increase again as a result of the growth of military-industrial complexes of the USSR. The main ones being: the Military Academy and the major Research and Development Establishment for Anti-Aircraft Defense.

Similarly, in Minsk, the main Engineering University for Radio-Technology of the USSR was opened in the mid fifties of the 20th century, and a bit later — the Minsk Engineering Anti-Aircraft Missile University. Minsk graduates from these Universities were better qualified than the graduates from other similar universities; that's why many of them were hired by the Tsver Research and Development Establishment (on Anti-Aircraft Defense), other graduates of these higher institutions chose to continue their education in the Military Academy in Tsver.

After graduation from the Academy many of them remained there to teach. A lot of Belarusans held chief positions in the departments and faculties of the Academy. The majority of them gained PhDs in military-and-technical sciences, others became Professors. Consequently, a community of fellow-countrymen was formed from the Belarusan army officers; it was a strong Belarusan lobby. A leading light of this community was the Tactics Director of the Academy of Military Sciences, Colonel Vikentsi Chorny, PhD, originating from the city of Kletsk in Belarus. Active roles were also played

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[1] Practical Russian-Belarusan Dictionary in 1924 together with Maxim Garetski, «Belarusan-Russian Dictionary» in 1925, «Russian-Belarusan Dictionary» in 1928 both with Syamen Nekrashevich , Practical Belarusan Army Dictionary, in 1927 together with A. Baranousky.

by other graduates of the Academy: Shuvyartkoŭ (Kletsk), Yaumenchyk, Prystupyuk, Kazloŭ.

By the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties of the last century this association of fellow-countrymen gained clearer national characteristics and developed a more defined Belarusan consciousness. In 1988, when Col. Victor Bychko entered the department of the extramural education in the Academy of Tsver having left a senior position in the army, this process was much accelerated. He came from the Iwye region, had been awarded a *Distinguished Service Medal,* and served in the General Headquarters of the anti-aircraft Defense Forces of the USSR.

Stanislaŭ Sudnik — from the Nesviž region, was also awarded a *Distinguished Service Medal*, and served in the biggest proving ground of the anti-aircraft Defense Forces of the USSR. He is the Editor-in-Chief of the *Naša Slova* newspaper.

Mikhail Ananič — from the Glybokae region, and **Mikhail Dubovik** from Uzda city also received a *Distinguished Service Medal,* and served in the Moscow zone of the anti-aircraft Defense Forces of the USSR.

The Belarusan language sounded throughout the Academy. This community made connections with the national communities in Belarus and sparked a revival of contemporary Belarusan literature within the Academy.

After the collapse of the USSR they started to develop an independent strategy for Belarusan Military Forces in the Faculties of the Academy. A group of Officers including Vikentsi Chorny and Stanislaŭ Sudnik came to Minsk to visit Stanislaŭ Shushkevich[1] and Vyachaslaŭ Kebich[2] but no

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[1] Stanislav Stanislavovich Shushkevich (Stanislaŭ Stanislavavič Šuškievič (born December 15, 1934 in Minsk)) is a Belarusan politician and scientist. From September 28, 1991 to January 26, 1994, he was first leader and head of state of independent Belarus after the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Chairman of the Supreme Soviet — also chairman of Parliament). He supported free market and democratic reforms and played a key role in the creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

[2] Vyachaslaŭ Frantsavich Kebich (born June 10, 1936) is a political figure from Belarus. He was the first Prime Minister of the Republic of Belarus, serving from 1991 until 1994, having held the equivalent office of the Belorussian SSR since 1990. Kebich was also one of two candidates in the final running for President of Belarus in 1994, but losing to current leader Alexander Lukashenko by a wide margin. After that election, he has led the Belarusan Commerce and

understanding was reached. The huge scientific potential of the entire Academy turned out not to be needed in Belarus.

At the beginning of 1992 thanks to the efforts of Colonel Chorny and Lieutenant Colonels Shuvyartkoŭ and Sudnik a Sunday class for Belarusan schoolchildren was opened on Gorki Street in Tsver.

At that time the military men of Tsver as well as all Belarusans enjoyed good relations with the citizens of Tsver. At public demonstrations they were called brothers; that is why there was no resistance to organizing the Belarusan Sunday classes for young Belarusans. Their class had about 15 students of different ages. They had rarely heard the Belarusan language before, but from the first lessons they spoke it quite naturally with no accent. As well as Belarusan language lessons, classes on Belarusan literature and traditions were taught by Colonel Stanislaŭ Sudnik.

Those 6 months of Belarusan studies had a serious influence in forming the mind set of the young Belarusans living in the Kryvičy's beautiful city of Tsver.

At the end of this narrative about the forgotten Belarusan state of Tsver it is appropriate to quote the words of the Russian historian Andrei Burovsky, who lives in Krasnoyarsk:

«*Where Moscow and Lithuania are fighting, there fights Asia with Europe. It is not incidental that the boarder between these parts of the world*



The main building of the Tsver Military Academy named after Marshal Zhukov

Financial Union and was member of the House of Representatives. Before his career as a politician, Kebich worked as an engineer.



Students of the Academy

is stubbornly drawn through Russian territory. And the choice of Suzdal and Tsver between the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Moscovia is not simply a vassal's choice between the two suzerains and it is not only a decision about which country to join — the strongest or the biggest. It is the choice between Europe and Asia».

It was no surprise that the Europeans wrote on their maps *Grand Tatars* on the site of Moscovia which was to the East of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, because up to 1480 it was part of the mighty Asian state of the Golden Horde.

For Belarusans not to loose themselves in the new 'Eurasia' they have to know their own history. It is not incidental that it is very difficult to find information about the history and culture of Tsver in Russian textbooks and encyclopedia. Until now Tsver was to Moscow like Carthage[1] was to Rome, and Moscow was intent on Tsver's destruction.

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[1] The first civilization that developed within the city's sphere of influence is referred to as Punic (a form of the word «Phoenician») or Carthaginian. The city of Carthage is located on the eastern side of Lake Tunis across from the centre of Tunis. According to Roman legend it was founded in 814 BCE by Phoenician colonists from Tyre under the leadership of Elissa (Queen Dido). It became a large and rich city and thus a major power in the Mediterranean. The resulting rivalry with Syracuse and Rome was accompanied by several

Colonel Vikentsi Čorny (rightmost) and Lieutenant Colonel Stanislaŭ Sudnik (second from right) in Minsk on Independence Square in 1992



In 1931 the Bolsheviks even renamed this ancient city as Kalinin to leave no evidence of its earlier fame as the freedom loving city of Tsver. However, the USSR collapsed and Tsver has reappeared on the European maps and Belarusans must never forget about their presence on the banks of the river Volga and the fact that the Volga, which is called the Great Russian River, flows from Kryvičy lands along with the Dnieper and the Western Dzvina Rivers.

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wars with respective invasions of each other's homeland. Hannibal's invasion of Italy in the Second Punic War culminated in the Carthaginian victory at Cannae and led to a serious threat to the continuation of Roman rule over Italy; however, Carthage emerged from the conflict at its historical weakest after Hannibal's defeat at the Battle of Zama in 202 BCE. After the Third Punic War, the city was destroyed by the Romans in 146 BCE. However, the Romans refounded Carthage, which became the Empire's third most important city and the capital of the short-lived Vandal kingdom. It remained one of the most important Roman cities until the Muslim conquest when it was destroyed a second time in CE 698.

Dedicated to
My remote ancestors of Mścisłaŭ

The Grand Duchy of Smalensk

In the 8th century the Kryvičy tribes started to populate the territory of Smalensk, where the Baltic tribes of the Dnieper River lived. They assimilated with the local population and were known as *The Kryvičy of Smalensk.* Historians think that under pressure of the German tribes, particularly the Saks branch, that the Western Slavs as well as the Kryvičy were moving to live in the catchment area of the Dnieper and Sož Rivers.

In addition, according to the Chronicles, the Radzimičy, neighbours of the Kryvičy, came here, so did the Vyatičy from the west (Poland). Around the same time the Varyags[1] were also arriving here. From the Dzvina and the Dnieper Rivers they created a Trade route from the Varangian settlements to Greece. 'This highway' connected countries in Northern and Western Europe with Asia but mainly with the Arab Caliphate and Byzantium.

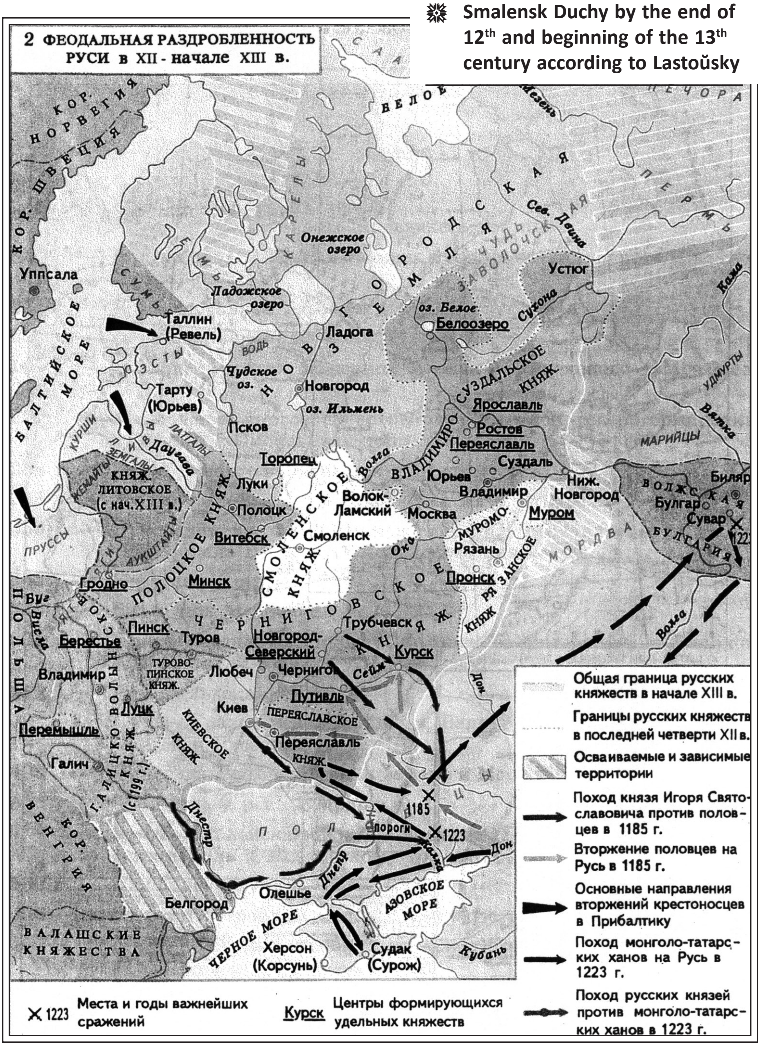
In the 9th century in the territory of Smalensk the first two town settlements sprang up, first was Gnezdovo[2] on the Dnieper River and a little later the town of Smalensk itself which was 12 kilometers from Gnezdovo. Some research-historians think that later on the citizens of Gnezdovo moved to live in Smalensk.

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[1] The Varangians or Varyags, sometimes referred to as Variagians, were Vikings who went eastwards and southwards through what is now Russia, Belarus and Ukraine mainly in the 9th and 10th centuries.

[2] Gnezdovo or Gnyozdovo is an archeological site located near the village of Gnyozdovo in Smalensk Oblast, Russia. The site contains extensive remains of a Slavic-Varangian settlement that flourished in the 10th century as a major trade station on the trade route from the Varangians to the Greeks. There are about 3,000 burial mounds, arranged in eight clusters of kurgans.

Smalensk Duchy by the end of 12th and beginning of the 13th century according to Lastoŭsky



Huge earth works (the Gnezdovo kurgans) surrounded Gnezdovo. Its excavation revealed a variety of women's jewelry which belonged not only to the Slavs, but to the Varangians and to the Finno-Ugros as well. For reasons unknown, by the beginning of the 9th century the majority of Gnezdovo's population had left the city; therefore Smalensk became the

largest city in the area. It was first mentioned in the annals in 863, which in dates is contemporary with Polatsk.

Smalensk quickly became a major trading center. Some historians think that its name is derived from the Belarusan word 'смаліць' — to smoke, to calk, which means to repair, fix and calk the hulls of the merchant ships, which went down stream from the Dnieper River to the Black Sea.



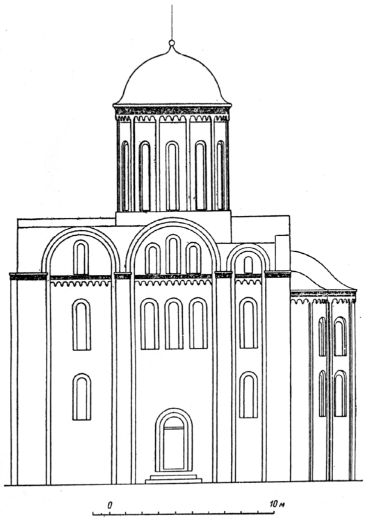
Smalensk: The Church of St. Peter and Paul (Eastern Part) 12th century

The chronicle runs that in 863 the Varangian Dukes, Askold and Dzir, tried to conquer Smalensk, but failed. It was only in 882 that the Varangian Duke, Oleg, a governor of Noŭharad, joined the Kryvičy's lands of Smalensk to his state and made the citizens pay tax to him. In the same year he conquered Kiev and a new mighty state was created on these lands — that of Kievan Rus'[1] with the capital in Kiev. Local citizens paid tythes to the Knyazes of Kiev; they delivered the tythes to certain places called Pogost[2] which later developed into the administrative and religions centres of the countryside.

After 988 at the order of Knyaz Vladimir of Kiev the Kryvičy of Smalensk adopted Christianity. Stanislav — a son of Knyaz Vladzimir — ruled from his court in Gnezdovo for 40 years. But gradually local Knyazes moved to live in Smalensk; they built their residences in the hills of the Sobor Moun-

[1] Kievan Rus' was a medieval state which existed from approximately 880 to the middle of the 13th century, the Mongol invasion of 1240.

[2] Pogost is a historical term with several meanings in the Russian language. It has also been borrowed into Latvian (pagasts) and Finnish (pogosta), with specific meanings. The original usage applies to the coaching inn for princes and ecclesiastics with the word being similar to modern Russian gost', «guest». It is assumed that originally pogosts were rural communities on the periphery of the ancient Russian state, as well as trading centers.



Smalensk. The Church of St. John the Evangelist. Southern facade. End of 12th — beginning of the 13th century. Reconstruction

tain. Here also lived Vyacheslav, son of the Yaroslav the Wise[1], who in 1054 became the Duke of Smalensk.

After Kievan Rus' was dissolved, Smalensk belonged to Knyaz Vladimir Monomakh[2] of Kiev and his descendants. In 1101 he built the first stone edifice in Smalensk — the Uspensky Sobor (Church). Monomakh joined the lands of Viatičy and that of the Baltic tribe Golyadz[3] (Golyad) to the Smalensk Duchy. In 1116 Monomakh carried out an attack on the Polatsk State and together with Smalenskers marched to Minsk, he failed to conquer it, but he joined the Polatsk's city of Kopys' to the Smalensk Duchy.

Monomakh died in 1125. His grandson Rostsislav Mstislavich[4],

[1] Yaroslav I the Wise (c. 978 — February 20, 1054) was thrice Grand Prince of Noŭharad and Kiev, uniting the two principalities for a time under his rule. During his lengthy reign, Kievan Rus' reached the zenith of its cultural flowering and military power.

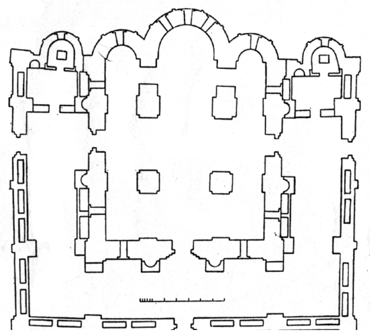
[2] Vladimir II Monomakh (Christian name Vasiliy, or Basileios) (1053 — May 19, 1125) was a famous Velikiy Kniaz (Grand Prince) of Kievan Rus'. He was the son of Vsevolod I (married in 1046) and Anastasia of Byzantium (d. 1067). Her father which some give as Emperor Constantine IX Monomachos, is not attested in any reliable primary source.

[3] The term «Galindians» may be applied to two distinct, and now extinct, tribes of the Balts. Most commonly, the term is used to describe the Western Galindians who lived in the southeast part of Prussia. Less commonly, it is used for a tribe that lived in the area of what is today Moscow.

The name «Galinda» is thought to derive from the Baltic word 'galas' («the end»), alluding to the fact that they settled for some time further west and further east than any other Baltic tribe.

[4] Rostislav Mstislavich (c. 1110 — 1167), Knyaz of Smalensk (1125–1160), Noŭharad (1154) and Velikiy Knyaz of Kiev (1154, 1159–1167). He was the

who is known as the founder of the dynasty of independent Dukes of Smalensk, became a ruler of the Grand Duchy of Smalensk. On the map of the medieval Europe the new state of Kryvičy appeared. Rostislav established the Smalensk Bishopric in his reign and one of the first legislative documents, called *The Statute of Rostislav,* was also written. It described the economic and political structure of the new state. The next Duke of Smalensk was his elder son Roman. In his reign the role of Smalensk Veche[1] was strengthened, a class of local boyars was growing, and appanaged principalities appeared. The first appanaged principality was formed to the north of Smalensk lands with its centre in the city of Toropets. Its Duke was Mstislav, was the youngest son of Roman.



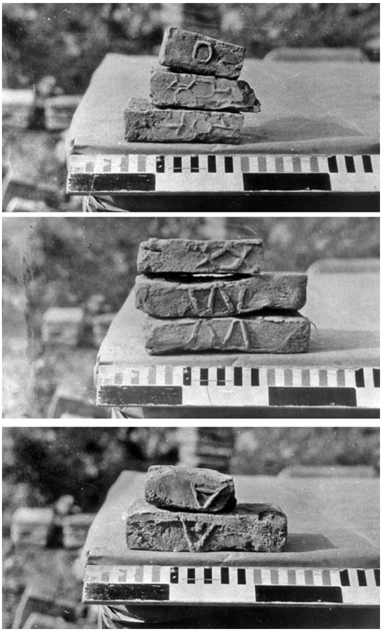
Smalensk. The Church of St. John the Evangelist. Reconstruction plan

Roman was replaced by his brother David. In 1187 the Smalensk citizens' rebellion, caused by a year of famine, was suppressed by him and many eminent boyars of the city were put to death. David had a strong brigade of hired soldiers — mercenaries — with his Army he conquered the Polatsk lands situated on the Western Dzvina bank. At that time the country actively traded with Western European countries.

In the 12th century the territory of the Duchy of Smalensk had tangibly grown. After the occupation of Kopys', a city of the Duchy of Polatsk, Knyaz Rostislav took over the North Radzimičy lands from the Dukes of Čarnihaŭ. Here, in the 12th century arose large cities such as Mscislaŭ, Roslaŭ, Krečut — Kryčaŭ, nowdays, and Prupoi, contemporary Slaŭgarad. To the East of Smalensk two other cities appeared — Daragabuzh and Elnia.

son of Mstislav I of Kiev and Christina Ingesdotter of Sweden.

[1] Veche was a popular assembly in medieval Slavic countries, and in late medieval period. Veche can be compared to the ecclesia of Classical Athens and other Old Greek polises. In Ukraine, the town veche was simply a gathering of community members to inform everybody of important events (vich-na-vich — eye-to-eye) and come up with a collective planning for the near future.



Plinthiform brick with remains of the cathedral wall. End of the 12th — beginning of the 13th century. Excavation made by Voronin. 1962–1963

The route from the Dnieper to the Volga River was controlled by the city of Viazma.

One day at the end of the 12th century a guild of construction workers from Polatsk arrived in Smalensk; they had come to build the Duke's palace and stone cathedrals. A distinctive Smalensk architectural school developed. It was characterized by churches with outside decorations in the form of two stepped flat pilasters of thin half columns, inside were painted frescos, and floors made from multicoloured ceramics tiles. Stone churches were built in other cities of the Smalensk Duchy as well, in Roslaŭ for example. The best preserved Smalensk church is the 35 metre high Church of St. Mikhail the Archangel, which was built at the end of the 12th century.

In the beginning of the 13th century the Crusaders occupied the mouth of the Dzvina River, which is why the influence of Smalensk on the Polatsk Duchy strongly increased. The Viciebsk and Drutsk Duchies also fell under its authority. In 1229 the trade treaty between the Germans on the one side and Smalensk, Polatsk and Viciebsk on the other side was signed to formalize trade on the Western Dzvina River. German merchants came to Smalensk and even built a rotund stone cathedral there.

In 1230 Smalensk suffered several tragedies: an earthquake followed by crop failures which in turn lead to famine and plague epidemics. Thousands of people died including the Duke of Smalensk. Shortly after, in 1238 the Khan Batyi's troops of the Golden Horde were closing in on Smalensk. «*The Story of the Mercury of Smalensk*» narrates the Smolianers fight against the Mongol-Tatars. The Smolianers were not defeated but from 1260's they had to pay tribute to the Golden Horde.



Smalensk Penyaz (Coin) with the depiction of the Cyrillic letter «Ю» and a lion

Despite these events in the 12–13th centuries the Smalensk Duchy became one of the biggest cultural territories among all other old Belarusan Duchies.

In one of the burial mounds of Gnezdovo a huge clay amphora was found with the inscription in Cyrillic of «ГОРОУШНА», which means mustard. Scientists have dated this inscription to the middle of the 10th century and regard it to be one of the first East Slavic inscriptions made in Cyrillic[1].

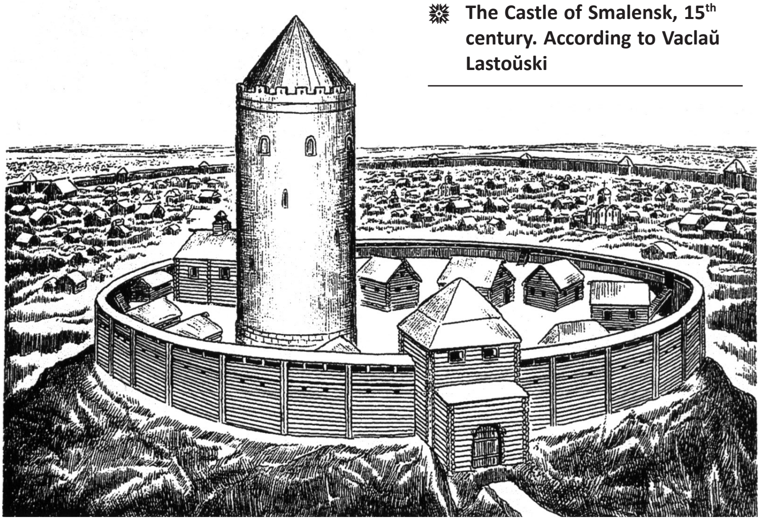


First Smalensk coins with pillars and lion

Also in the 12th century, during the reign of Duke Rostislav and his sons, Smalensk gained cultural and educational fame. Duke Roman opened schools in the city and teachers were invited from Byzantium and Western European countries. Also the local priests Foma and Rygor were acknowledged for their erudition and the Kiev metropolitan Kliment[2] originated from Smalensk. Ordinary citizens of Smalensk could read and write. This was confirmed by birch bark manuscripts discovered during archaeological digs in the Smalensk

[1] The most unexpected discovery at Gnezdovo was a Kerch amphora with the earliest inscription attested in the Old Russian language. The excavator has inferred that the word «gorušna», inscribed on the pot in Cyrillic letters, designates mustard that was kept there. This explanation has not been universally accepted and the inscription seems to be open to different interpretations. The dating of the inscription to the mid-10th century suggests a hitherto unsuspected popularity of the Cyrillic script in pre-Christian Rus'.

[2] Klim (Kliment) Smoliatich — (b. ? in Smalensk region, d. after 1164) — was a Ukrainian Orthodox metropolitan (official title — Metropolitan of Kiev and All-Rus'). A Kiev metropolitan (1147–54) and church figure from the Smalensk region (from which his surname is derived), Belarus. A monk of the Zarub Monastery, Klim was elected metropolitan by a synod of the hierarchy of the Rus' church under pressure from Prince Iziaslav Mstyslavych. However, his election was never confirmed by the Patriarch of Constantinople.



The Castle of Smalensk, 15th century. According to Vaclaŭ Lastoŭski

area. There are also ancient signatures scribbled on the walls of Smalensk churches. The Smalensk Manuscript was found there as well; it had been written between the 13th and 15th century. This masterpiece is very patriotic and is full of literary images of the far reaching strength and independence of the Grand Duchy of Smalensk.

In the 14th century the GDL became a western neighbour of the Duchy of Smalensk. Its eastern neighbour was the Duchy of Moscovia, an autonomous part of the Golden Horde. At the end of the 13th and the beginning of the 14th centuries the Mozhaisk appanaged principality was defeated by Moscovian troops. But the Dukes of Smalensk took temporary control of the territories of Bransk. After Duke Alhierd's marriage to the Viciebsk princess Maria[1]

[1] Maria of Viciebsk (died before 1349) was the first wife of Alhierd, future Grand Duke of Lithuania (marriage took place around 1318). Very little is known about her life. The only child of a Russian prince Yaroslav, Maria was the only heir to the Principality of Viciebsk. After her father's death ca. 1345, Viciebsk fell permanently under control of Alhierd and other Gediminids. Maria gave birth to five sons, all of whom grew up while Alhierd was still only a regional duke in Slavic lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. All five sons were baptized in Orthodox rite and ruled Russian lands giving rise to prominent clans of Russian dukes (Trubetskoy family from Demetrius I Starshy, Tsartoryski family from Constantine, Sanguszko family from Fiodor, Belsky and Olelkovich families from Valdimir). After Maria's death, Alhierd

(Alhierd's second wife was Juliana, Princess of Tsver) he joined lands of Viciebsk with the GDL so that they bordered with Smalensk. By the end of the 1320's Ivan, Duke of Smalensk, regarded Gedimin, Alhierd's father, as his «elder brother» (a gesture which aimed to preserve the trade route from the Western Dzvina to Hanseatic trade route cities).

In 1331 and 1333 Moscovian troops made two attempts to conquer Smalensk, but were fought back and Smalensk stopped paying tribute to the Golden Horde. Smalensk became an ally of the GDL and in 1348 Smalensk troops took the side of the GDL; in the battle against the Crusaders on the River Strave one of the Dukes of Smalensk was killed.

In 1352 an epidemic of plague reached Smalensk from Western Europe. Many people from cities across the Duchy died and the state was weakened. Taking advantage of the situation, Grand Duke Alhierd of the GDL assimilated the cities of Mscislaŭ, Kryčaŭ and Roslaŭ into his state. But later he signed the Union Treaty with Duke Svyatoslav of Smalensk and together they marched to Moscow and conquered it.

After Alhierd's death, power in the GDL was passed to his son Jagaila, who in 1385, after the signing of the Act of Krewa[1], simultaneously became the King of Poland. His elder brother Andrei, Knyaz of Polatsk, decided to seize power in the GDL with support of the Crusaders and Svyatoslav, Knyaz of Smalensk. Syatoslav first tried to conquer Viciebsk and Orša and then he besieged the city of Mscislaŭ wishing to return it to the Mscislaŭ

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married another Russian princess, Uliana of Tsver. After Alhierd' death, eldest sons of Maria and Uliana battled over succession rights.

[1] The Union of Krewo, also known as Krėva Act (other names Union of Krevo, Act of Kreva) was a set of promises of Jagaila, Grand Duke of Lithuania, for marriage between him and the underage reigning Queen Jadwiga of Poland. Through this marriage a personal or dynastic union between Poland and Lithuania was created. The document was signed in Kreva Castle on 14 August, 1385, and provided for the following:

the marriage proposal. Marriage was arranged between Lithuanian Grand Duke Jagaila and Jadwiga of Poland;

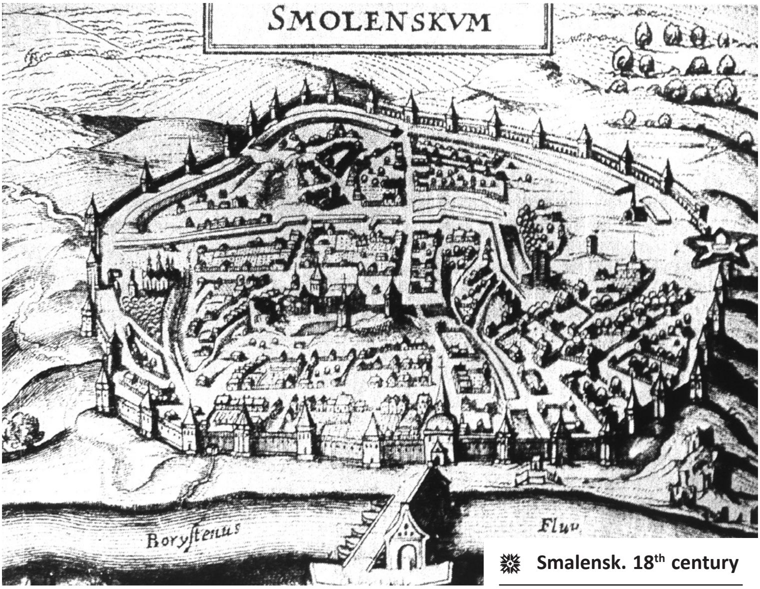
the conversion of pagan Jagaila, Lithuanian nobles and all pagan Lithuanians to Roman Catholicism;

paying two hundred thousand florins to William, Duke of Austria. Money were paid as a compensation for the dissolution of engagement agreement between Jadwiga of Poland and William;

the return of the lost Polish lands by Jagaila;

the release of all Christian war prisoners held by the Lithuanians;

applicare lands of Lithuania and Ruthenia to the Crown of Poland.



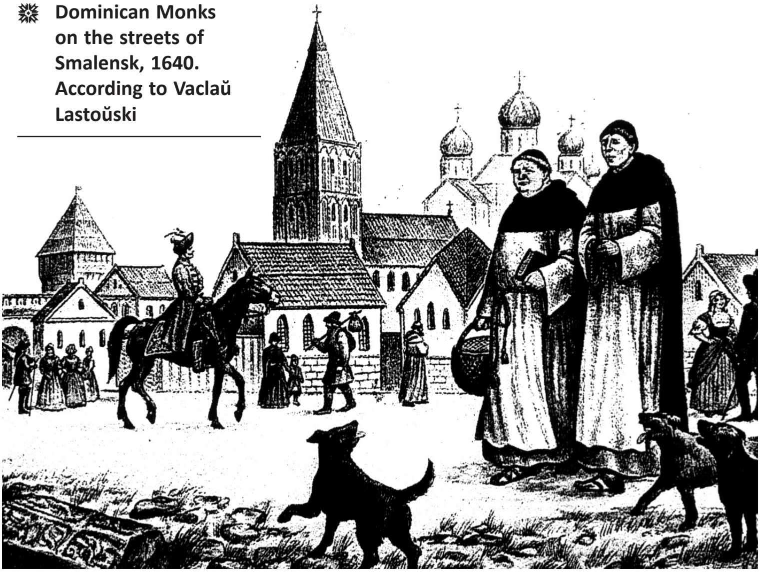
Smalensk. 18th century

Duchy. However, on May 7, 1386 the troops of Jagaila defeated the Smalensk forces near Mscislaŭ killed Knyaz Svyatoslav and besieged Smalensk. The Veche of Smalensk paid a huge price for Yuri, a son of Svyatoslav, to become the Knyaz of Smalensk. He had to swear allegiance to Jagaila and become his vassal.

Meanwhile in the GDL Knyaz Vitaŭt came to power, he was married to Hanna, a daughter of the Smalensk Knyaz Svyatoslav. He decided to incorporate the Smalensk Duchy into the GDL. In 1395 Vitaŭt took prisoner all the Smalensk Knyazes (Yuri managed to escape) liquidated the Grand Duchy of Smalensk and in key positions appointed two deputies of his own — Vasil-Yamant Tuluntavich and Vasil Bareikavich. However, at this historic period the first Smalensk coins depicting the lion from the coat of arms of Smalensk were minted.

In 1399 Vitaŭt was defeated in the battle against the Golden Horde at the Vorsa River. Then, in 1401 Yuri captured Smalensk and ruled until 1404. Yuri continued the practice of minting coins. His coins also carried the lion of the Smalensk but on the other side was the Cyrillic letter «Ю» — the first letter of his name — *Юрый*.

In 1404 Knyaz Vitaŭt — once again and this time completely — conquered the city and the Grand Duchy of Smalensk.

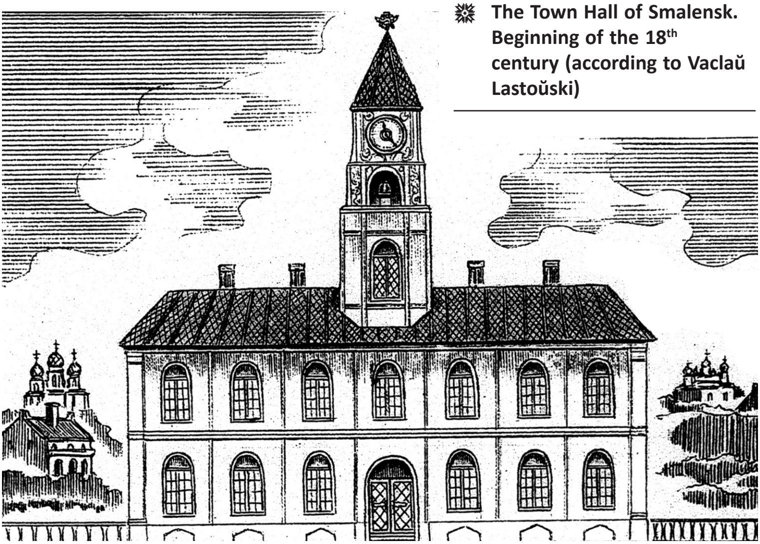


Dominican Monks on the streets of Smalensk, 1640. According to Vaclaŭ Lastoŭski

In 1410, the three so called 'Smalensk' battalions fought in the famous Battle of Grunwald[1]. These were the Orša, Mscislaŭ and Smalensk battalions. However, in Russian and Soviet text-books these battalions are insistently called «three Russian battalions from Smalensk». Nevertheless these battalions saved the situation in the front line of the battle of the joint military forces and despite big losses stopped the Crusaders.

In April 1440 the citizens of Smalensk rebelled against Andrei, a war lord of the Great Duke of the GDL, and Yury Syamyonavich, Knyaz of Mscislaŭ, became the Knyaz of Smalensk. The citizens of Viciebsk and

[1] The Battle of Grunwald (or 1st Battle of Tannenberg) took place on July 15, 1410, with king Jagaila leading the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in alliance against the knights of the Teutonic Order who were led by the Grand Master Ulrich von Jungingen. The engagement in the Polish-Lithuanian-Teutonic War (1409–1411) was one of the most important battles in Medieval Europe, and the largest battle to involve knights. The forces of the Monastic State of the Teutonic Knights were decisively defeated in the battle, but were able to defend their castles and retain most of their territories despite the long-term consequences they suffered as a result of losing the battle. The order never recovered its former power, and the financial burden of the ensuing reparations eventually caused a rebellion of cities and landed gentry.



The Town Hall of Smalensk. Beginning of the 18th century (according to Vaclaŭ Lastoŭski)

Polatsk joined the uprising. In autumn 1440 a new Knyaz of the GDL — Kazimir — made a stand against the rebels. Yuri fled to Noŭharad and Kazimir's army captured Smalensk and other cities of the Duchy, and the rebellion was crushed.

Despite all the conflicts in 15th century the Smalensk Duchy enjoyed prosperity. It was ruled by the deputy of the Grand Duke (Knyaz) appointed from the local land owners who was represented both in Sejm[1] (Early Parliament) and the GDL Rada (Council). At the bottom of the governing hierarchy was the Veche of Smalensk, it considered and resolved every day

[1] Seimas (Sejm, Sojm) was an early parliament in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. It was active from 1445 to 1569, when it was officially abolished by the Union of Lublin. The Seimas was an irregular gathering of the Lithuanian nobility, called as needed by the Grand Duke or during an interregnum the Lithuanian Council of Lords (an early government). The meetings would usually last about 1 or 2 weeks. Seimas gradually evolved from a meeting of the most powerful magnates to a full legislative institution representing all of the nobility. The Seimas was not the main political player as it was overshadowed by the Council of Lords. The Union of Lublin created a new state, the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, and joined the Seimas of Lithuania with Sejm of Poland into one Sejm of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. However, the Seimas continued to convene under the name of Lithuanian Convocation. In total there were 40 Seimas and 37 Convocations.

problems of the city and surrounding villages. The Grand Knyaz' deputy had a local rada which consisted of the Bishop of Smalensk, judge's marshal and other representatives of the cities authorities. The lower middle class of Smalensk elected their own representative — starosta[1]. All territory of the Smalensk Duchy was divided into separate volosts[2], which were administered by governor's assistants called bailiffs. The privileges of the citizens of Smalensk Duchy were written down in the Grand Duchy's muniment of the years 1404, 1442, 1505. Next to the Grand Duchy of Smalensk lay the autonomous Duchies of Mscislaŭ, Viazma and Daragabuzh.

From 1404 in the centre of the Smalensk Duchy territory the Smalensk voivodship[3] was created. At that time Smalensk continued to be one of the major old Belarusan cultural centres, where chronicles and religious literature flourished.

At the end of the 14th century Luka Smalianin wrote the famous *Psalter*[4] *of Smalensk* in the monastery of the Assumption in Pustyn, near Mscislaŭ. It was written on birchbark parchment and was beautifully illuminated with illustrations of saints, animals and different fantastic creatures. The 150 initial letters were wonderfully ornamented with intricate designs. For letter decoration the vibrant colours of blue, green, red and gold were used.

In 1657 at the order of Patriarch Nikon the Psalter was evacuated to the island of Kiy, which is in the Onega Bay on the White Sea. Today it is in the Museum of History in Moscow.

In the 15th century *the Chronicle of Smalensk* and other historico-literary works such as «*Panegirics for Vitaŭt*» and «*Belarusan-Lithuanian Chronicle*» were written, they described different happenings and events in the territory of Smalensk the GDL, as well as in neighbouring territories.

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[1] headman

[2] Volost was a traditional administrative subdivision in Eastern Europe. In earlier East Slavic history, volost was a name for the territory ruled by the knyaz, a principality; either as an absolute ruler or with varying degree of autonomy from the Velikiy Knyaz (Grand Prince). Starting from the end of the 14th century, volost was a unit of administrative division in Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Poland, Moscovia, lands of modern Latvia and Ukraine. Since about the 16th century it was a part of provincial districts, that were called «uyezd» in Moscovia and later Russian Empire. Each uyezd had several volosts that were subordinated to the uyezd city.

[3] province

[4] psalmbook

At the end of the 15th century at the Bishops' court in Smalensk a monk named Avraamka compiled the 450 page «*Chronicle of Avraamka*».

Historians think that in the 15th century the widely known «*Chronicle of the Radzivil*»[1] was written by an unknown author in Smalensk as well, it lived up to its name because it once belonged to Yanush Radzivil. Then the Chronicle appeared to be in Königsberg[2] and in the 18th century — in St. Petersburg, where it is now. This Chronicle has about 600 colored drawings, which are frequently used to illustrate textbooks and encyclopedia.

The travelers of Smalensk also left lively recollections of their travels. They are: the archimandrite Agrefiy, who in 1370 described his journey to Palestine. The farther confessor Ignatius of Smalensk, who in 1389 accompanied the Metropolitan Pimen in his pilgrimages to Constantinople, left a work of literature describing this journey. One particularly important artifact and a beautiful piece of Belarusan writing is the detailed description or *«The Story of the Uprising in Smalensk»* written in the first half of the 15th century. Researchers consider it to be of high artistic merit and find its old Belarusan language to be outstanding.

However, by the end of the 15th century the peaceful life of Smalensk was over. The Moscovian Knyaz Ivan III announced himself to be '*Tsar of all Rus'* and set out to conquer the Belarusan lands starting with Smalensk. He began with small ventures to the Vyazma Duchy. A great war broke out in 1492 and in the winter of 1493 the Moscovian troops captured Vyazma

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[1] Russian Federation — The Radzivil Chronicle.

Written in old Russian, this monumental work reveals the history of Russia and its neighbors from the fifth to the early thirteenth century in pictorial form, representing events described in the manuscript with more than six hundred colour illustrations.

Known to the scholarly community according to its ownership in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Radzivil, or Kenigsberg Chronicle, is the most ancient surviving example of the art of Russian illuminated chronicle. It is a fifteenth century copy of a thirteenth century archetype held by the Library of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Saint Petersburg (BAN).

[2] Königsberg was the capital of East Prussia from the Late Middle Ages until 1945. It was founded by the Teutonic Knights just south of the Sambian peninsula in 1255 during the Northern Crusades and named in honour of King Ottokar II of Bohemia (the German-language name Königsberg literally means «King's mountain»). The city successively became the capital of their monastic state, the Duchy of Prussia, and East Prussia. The Baltic port developed into a German cultural center, being the residence of, among others, Richard Wagner, Immanuel Kant, E. T. A. Hoffmann, and David Hilbert.

and in June 1500 — Daragabuzh. On July 25, 1500, the GDL army headed by hetman[1] Konstatin Astrožski was defeated by the Moscovian troops on the Vedrasha River near Daragabuzh; Astrožski was taken prisoner, but he managed to escape and fled to Vilnia.

In 1501 the Moscovians besieged Smalensk but could not take it and withdrew their troops.

Another war began in 1512. In summer 1514 the Moscovian army of 80,000 soldiers and 300 canons headed by Vasil III besieged Smalensk on all sides, repeated attacks followed. The city was occupied. In September 1514 in the battle near Orša under the command of hetman Astrožski of the GDL the Moscovian troops were defeated. Embolden with this victory the citizens of Smalensk headed by Bishop Varsanofiy began preparations for rebellion. However, a traitor disclosed their plans and the leaders of the rebellion were killed. The Bishop was exiled to a monastery. The boyars of Smalensk and the town's people were relocated to Moscow and the Muscovites colonized Smalensk. Meanwhile the GDL did not recognize the capture of Smalensk.

The new power [Moscovia] took the majority of Smalensk Duchy land and property into state ownership and populated it with peasantry from the centre of the Moscovian state. Many Orthodox monasteries were built which also served as places of defense during war time.

In the beginning of the 14th century Smalensk was surrounded by wooden fortifications (walls and towers) with a stone tower at the South-west end of the city similar to the one in Kameniec. The city was surrounded and protected by the rampart and its walls were strengthened with pointed wooden logs.

The GDL made attempts to regain the city. There were campaigns in the years of 1535, 1544, 1552–1553 but they were not successful. At time of the Livonian war in Smalensk new fortifications were built; the Residency of the Bishop on the Sabor Mountain was surrounded by a high stone wall; a couple of stone towers were built further behind, which from the west were joined together by the stone wall. However, Stefan Batory, did not reach Smalensk.

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[1] Hetman was the title of the second highest military commander (after the monarch) used in 15th to 18th century Poland and Grand Duchy of Lithuania, known from 1569 to 1795 as the Rzeczpospolita. It was the highest military title in Cossack Hetmanate as well as the head of state.

Having lost the Livonian war Moscovia returned Vyalizh to the GDL and started to reinforce Smalensk. In December 1595 the local architect Fedor Kon arrived in the city and he headed the construction work on Smalensk's stone fortifications, taking the Moscow Kremlin[1], built by the Italians as his blue print. The works began in spring 1596 and went on for 6 years. Approximately 20,000 people were employed on the project. The stone walls were 6,5 km long, 10–13 metres high and 4 to 6 metres thick. 38 towers were also built, they were of different forms: round, multangular, and quadrangular. Tower gates were also constructed. Especially beautiful was the Tower of Frolov, it was erected at the bridge across the Dniepr River.

The walls were built from thick red bricks. From the outside the walls were whitewashed and painted. Tsar Boris Godunov himself visited the construction site. Nowadays only 18 towers and about 3 km of the stone wall survive.

In the first half of the 17th century Smalensk suffered numerous wars. In September 1609 the army of Žygimont III, the King of Rzecz Pospolita, besieged Smalensk. The blockade lasted for 20 months and in July 1611 Smalensk was taken by the GDL and Polish troops.

In 1618 the Treaty of Deulino[2] was signed, according to it the greater part of the territory of Smalensk, apart from Viazma, was returned to the GDL. The Smalensk voivodship was reestablished consisting of the Smalensk and Staradub paviets.

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[1] The Kremlin walls as they now appear were built between 1485 and 1495.

[2] Truce of Deulino (also known as Peace Treaty of Dywilino) was signed on 11 December, 1618 and took effect on 4 January, 1619. It concluded the Polish–Muscovite War (1605–1618) between the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Tsardom of Russia.

The agreement marked the greatest geographical expansion of the Commonwealth, which lasted until the Commonwealth conceded the loss of Livonia in 1629. The Commonwealth gained control over the Smalensk and Charnihaŭ Voivodships. The truce was set to expire in 14.5 years. The parties exchanged prisoners, including Filaret Romanov, Patriarch of Moscow.

Władysław IV, son of Commonwealth king Sigismund III Vasa, refused to relinquish his claim to the Moscow throne. Therefore in 1632, when the Truce of Deulino expired and Sigismund III died, hostilities were immediately resumed in the course of a conflict known as the Smalensk War, which ended in the Treaty of Polanów in 1635.

At that time, the population of the city of Smalensk was 11,000 citizens; other major cities in the territory were Krasny, Roslaŭ, Daragabuzh and Bely all of which enjoyed the privileges of the Magdeburg Rights[1].

The composition of the population had also changed — many Belarusans moved to Smalensk, the Jews preferred to settle in small towns[2] (they were not country folks. The Smalensk Orthodox clergy accepted the Greek-Catholic branch of the Christianity. The majority of the Smalensk nobles (szlachta) were Catholics, a religion, which engendered various holy orders of Monks, including the Jesuits.

A Jesuits collegium was opened in Smalensk, where the children of the local nobles were educated.

The centre of the Orthodox religion was the Biaziuk Monastery, situated near Daragabuzh.

In 1632 a new war against Smalensk began. The Moscovian troops headed by Mikhail Shein defeated Daragabuzh and besieged Smalensk. The siege lasted for 10 months until the army of the Rzecz Pospolita came

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[1] Magdeburg Rights, or Magdeburg Law, were a set of German town laws regulating the degree of internal autonomy within cities and villages granted with it by a local ruler. Modelled and named after the laws of Magdeburg developed during many centuries of the Holy Roman Empire, it was possibly the most important set of Germanic medieval city laws. Adopted by numerous monarchs in Central and Eastern Europe, the law was a milestone in urbanization of the region and prompted the development of thousands of villages and cities.

[2] Small number of Jews, settled in Russian and Ukrainian towns, suffered occasional persecutions, owing to religious fanaticism, but on the whole relations between the Jews and Christians were satisfactory and the former suffered no legal limitations. Converted Jews occasionally rose to important positions in the Russian State, i.e. Peter Shafirov, vice-chancellor under Peter the Great, was of Jewish origin.

Their situation changed radically during the reign of Catherine II, when the Russian Empire acquired rule over large Lithuanian and Polish territories, which were heavily populated by Jews, especially during the second (1793) and the third (1795) Partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Under the Commonwealth's legal system, Jews endured restrictions euphemised as «disabilities», which also continued following Russian rule. Catherine established the Pale of Settlement that included Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine, and the Crimea (the latter was later excluded). Jews were supposed to reside in the Pale and required special permission to emigrate into Russia proper. Within the Pale, Jews were given right of voting in municipal elections, but their vote was limited to one third of the total number of voters.

and surrounded them. Michail Shein had to capitulate and the Smalensk territory remained in the GDL.

Another war broke out in spring 1654. First, the army of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich occupied Daragabuzh and Roslaŭ, and in June besieged Smalensk. After a long siege, the garrison surrendered the city meeting no resistance on their way and left it. The majority of the local nobles of Smalensk swore allegiance to the Tsar and this way preserved their property. Until the Treaty of Andrusovo[1] signed in 1667, a greater part of the Smalensk Duchy, apart from Mstsislau, was under the power of the Russian Tsar. Many Belarusan war prisoners from around Orša, Dubroŭna and Viciebsk were resettled to live there. Therefore the Grand Duchy of Smalensk remained an ethnic Belarusan territory.

In the beginning of the 18th century the nobles of Smalensk took an active part in the wars of Peter the First (Peter the Great). The cavalry battalion of Smalensk nobles took part in marches on Azov and the Crimea; for its part in the battle of Narva the battalion received *A Letter of Commendation.* The Smalensk Infantry and Dragoon Guards also consisted of Belarusans.

In September 1708 Swedish troops attacked the Duchy of Mscislaŭ. On September 10 the battle between the Swedish and Russian armies took place near the village of Raeŭka. In that battle the Swedish troops lost about a thousand soldiers before turning their way south, to Ukraine.

In 1708 the Smalensk hubernia with 17 cities was formed. A former Smalensk voivod, boyar Saltykov, became a first Smalensk govenor. In 18th century an ecclesiastical seminary and an elementary preparatory school for the children of schlachta and merchants were opened in Smalensk. But the local schlachta sent their children to study in the universities of Vilnia, Prague and Krakow. By the end of the 18th century the Smalensk hubernia was divided into the 12 paviets: that of Smalensk, Bielsk, Viazma, Gžack, Daragabuzh, Duchauscuna, Elnia, Krasnae, Parecy, Roslaŭ, Sačeŭ and Juchnaŭka. Such divisions continued until the beginning of 1918.

In 1772, after the 1st partition of the Rzecz Pospolita, the Russian Empire took over the Western part of the territory of Smalensk hubernia as well, which was in the Mscislaŭ voivodship. In 1739 Knyaz Grigory Potemkin-Tavricheski was born in the village of Čyžava in the Duchauščynski paviet

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[1] The Truce of Andrusovo (also sometimes known as Treaty of Andrusovo) was a thirteen and a half year truce, signed in 1667 between Tsardom of Russia and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which were at war since 1654 over the territories of modern-day Ukraine and Belarus.



His Serene Highness Prince Grigory Potemkin-Tavricheski

in Smalensk hubernia. He was one of the most influential figures of the era of the Queen Catherine II.

He gained the title of Knyaz and the rank of General-Field Marshal; he also was the President of the military collegiums. From 1785 he was the Chief Commander of the Black Sea Fleet and the Head of the Black Sea Admiralty.

At his order the cities of Kherson, Nikolaev and Sevastopol were established as land bases for the Black Sea Fleet. It is worth mentioning that the Potemkin dynasty used «Pahonia»[1] as their coat of arms. In their case it depicted an armed hand with a sword on gold background raised for combat from behind a blue cloud as their coat of arms was only a part of the Pahonia.

After 1772 Potemkin-Tavrichesky received the Belarusan city of Kryčaŭ with its suburbs into his ownership. He built a palace there in pseudo-gothic style and a factory for the production of sails and ropes for the Black Sea Fleet.

In 1780 Catherine II visited Mscislaŭ and Mahilioŭ where she met with the Austrian Emperor Josef II. Together they went to Smalensk and also visited the birth place of Knyaz Potemkin.

Apart from Kryčaŭ, Knyaz Potemkin also acquired the city of Dubroŭna in the Viciebsk lands. He established a number of industries and the first watch factory in the Russian Empire where wrist and pocket watches, wall and chimney clocks were made. They were in great demand.

In 1812 the Napoleonic War raged through Moscow and Smalensk — the whole territory of Smalensk was ruined and pillaged once again. In the fires of this war the famous Chronicle of Polatsk disappeared. But after

[1] The Pahonia (translated as Chaser) is a historical symbol of Belarus. Pahonia was the official state symbol of the Belarusan National Republic in 1918 and the official coat of arms of Belarus from 1991 to 1995. The heraldic shield features a red field with an armored knight on a white (silver) horse holding a silver sword in his right hand above his head. A silver shield hangs on the left shoulder of the charging knight, and a golden (yellow) Patriarchal cross appears on the shield.

the war Smalensk hubernia enjoyed a hundred years of peaceful life; its territory steadily developed as it had an indigenous Belarusan population.

In 1904 a fundamental work «The Belarusans»[1] by Jaŭkhim Karski[2] was published in Vilnia, he wrote that: «*the Belarusan language can be heard all over the Smalensk hubernia*». This information had also been illustrated in his «*The Ethnographic Map of the Belarusan Tribe*». These areas of Belarusan resettlement were also confirmed by another Belarusan historian — Mitrafan Doŭnar-Zapolski.

During the First World War when almost all the territory of Belarus was occupied by the Germans, a great Belarusan poet Yanka Kupala, along with Maxim Garecky and other outstanding Belarusan figures, moved to live and work in Smalensk. In December 1917 delegates from the Smalensk regions took part in the *First All-Belarusan Summit* in Minsk.

On March 25, 1917 the establishment of the Belarusan National Republic (BNR) in the borders of the Belarusan population resettlement was announced. When on December 30, 1918 a temporary Belarusan government of the workers and peasants headed by Zmitser Žylunovič was created, the Bolsheviks had to accept the fact that the Smalensk territory belonged to Belarus, the Manifest was made public. According to it a major

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[1] Karski's seminal seven-volume work «Belarusans» is considered to be the «Belarusan philology encyclopedia, unique by the extent and depth of the material» (M. S. Derzhavin), «uncomparable to any other study of Slavonic people in exhaustiveness» (Lyapunov). This work was the first to scientifically disprove the concept of the linguistic identity between the Russian and the Old Belarusan language, and from this argued for the existence of a distinct Belarusan nationality, presenting to a wider world the richness of the Belarusan traditional culture. This work «opened the eyes of Belarusans to see themselves as a real nation», putting them (in the beg. 20th cent.) «unexpectedly at the head of all the Slavonic people in the scientific knowledge about their language» (Belarusan historian V. Tumash).

[2] Jaŭkhim Fiodaravič Karski was born on 1 January, 1861 (20 December 1860), in Lasha (Grodno Uyezd of Grodno Governorate, now in Hrodna Voblast) and died 29 April, 1931. He was a notable linguist-Slavist, ethnographer and paleographer, founder of the Belarusan linguistics, literary studies and paleography, a member of numerous scientific institutions, author of more than 100 works on the linguistics, ethnography, paleography etc.

Karski was described by his contemporaries as a person extremely industrious, accurate, self-organised, reserved in behaviour, was acclaimed as a scientist of the highest integrity. Karski's input into the contemporary Slavistics, especially into the Belarusan branch, was immense.

territory of the Smalensk hubernia, besides the paviets of Gžack, Sycheŭ, Viazma, and Juhaŭka were incorporated into the Soviet Belarus country; The BSSR consisted then of the 7 oblasts; that of Minsk, Smalensk, Viciebsk, Mahilioŭ, Homiel, Horadnia and Baranavičy. Until January 5, 1919 the city of Smalensk was its capital.

The Smalensk hubernia (nowadays — oblast) consisted of the following paviets (nowadays — region): Smalensk, Bielsk, Duchauščyna, Pareč, Daragabuzh, Elnia, Krasnae and Roslaŭ. However, as early as on January 16, 1919, the Bolsheviks took away from the BSSR the Viciebsk, Mahilioŭ and Smalensk hubernias and joined them to the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic (RSFSR). On July 11, 1919 the Mscislaŭ paviet of the Mahilioŭ hubernia was joined to the Smalensk hubernia. On September 26, 1919 a part of the Orša paviet of the Viciebsk hubernia was joined to the Smalensk hubernia and 3 years later, on July 27, 1922 — the Gorack paviet.

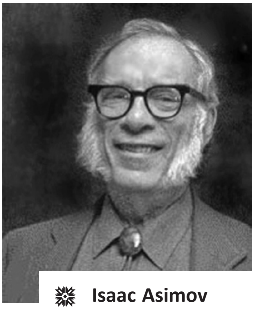
In 1924 sixteen paviets of the Viciebsk, Homiel and Smalensk hubernias were returned to Belarus. Meanwhile from the Smalensk hubernia Belarus received only the Gorack paviet and a half of the Mscilaŭ paviet with its centre in Mscislaŭ. Eventually, the RSFSR received the well-known town of Lubavičy, where in the 19th century a large community of the Hasids[1] under leadership of Sneur-Zalman[2] was created, they representated a Jewish religious mystical movement, which was called «*Hasids of Lubavičy*». From 1940 the centre of *The Hasids of Lubavičy* is in New York.

In 1920 Aizek Azimaŭ (Isaac Asimov) was born in the village of Piatrovičy of the Šumiack region near Mscislaŭ. He became a famous writer in America, best known for his science fiction works, the Founda-

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[1] Lithuanian Hasidim followed Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, who founded Habad Hasidism, and Rabbi Aharon of Karlin. The intellectual Habad method of Schneur Zalman, developed the mind, in contrast to general Hasidism, as the fundamental route to Hasidic spirituality. Chabad-Lubavitch is a Hasidic movement in Orthodox Judaism. One of the world's largest Hasidic movements, it is based in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, New York. The name «Chabad» is an acronym for Chochmah, Binah, Da'at «Wisdom, Understanding, and Knowledge». «Lubavitch» is the only major extant branch of a family of Hasidic groups once known collectively as the Chabad movemen

[2] Hasidic Judaism or Hasidism, from the Hebrew: Hasidus meaning «piety», is a branch of Orthodox Judaism that promotes spirituality and joy through the popularisation of Jewish mysticism as the fundamental aspects and of the Jewish faith. The majority of Hasidic Jews are ultra-orthodox.



Isaac Asimov



Members of the Mahilioŭ Language Society for the promotion of the Belarusan Language at the memorial to Isaac Asimov, Smalensk region

tion and Robot series. He was also a biochemist and a Professor at Boston University.

In November 2012 fellow members of the Mahilioŭ Belarusan language society visited the village where the great science fiction writer was born. They could hardly find the commemorative column for Asimov and were deeply upset to see that the memorial plate had been stolen from it and that the surrounding grass was overgrown. They cleared the area and decided to replace the missing memorial plaque.



Alexander Tvardovsky

In 1910 Alexander Tvardovsky, a famous Russian poet and a public figure, was born at the isolated farmstand of Zagorie in the Patcynsk region. He was an Editor-in-chief of «Novy Mir» (Новый Мир) journal. He knew the Belarusan language very well and translated into Russian many verses by Belarusan poets such as Yanka Kupala, Yakub Kolas, Arkadz Kuliašoŭ and others, he also devoted to Belarus many verses of his own.

On March 9, 1934 in the village of Klushyna of the Gzhatsk region of the Smalensk oblast Yuri Alekseevich Gagarin, the first cosmonaut of the World was born. In her documentary book about the World's first cosmonaut a Moscow writer Lidiya Obukhova wrote that when Yuri Gagarin was a small boy his favorite verse was that of the Belarusan



Yuri Gagarin

poet Yanka Kupala[1] «A Boy and a Pilot» (Хлопчык і Лётчык).

According to the people he met and talked with, Yuri Gagarin liked to have contacts with the Belarusan nationals and often expressed feelings of affection for Belarusans. (Evidently, his ancestors were Belarusans.)

So by the end of the 19th century the Smalensk territory was mostly populated by the Belarusans who talked the Belarusan language.

In the 1920's Belarusan Communists raised the question of returning some regions of the Smalensk oblast, especially those areas, which had been parts of the Mahilioŭ hubernia before. The 1897 population censuses showed that at that time 70–85% of the Smalensk population considered them to be Belarusans and wanted to be joined to the BSSR.

At the beginning of the Soviet era a Belarusan section of the hubernian educational department functioned in Smalensk. In addition, the Belarusan Students' Association of Fellow Countrymen operated at the Smalensk University. In villages Belarusan school reading rooms and special 'propaganda houses' (so called «Red Corners») promoting the BSSR were opened. However, at the beginning of the 1930's the terrible era of Stalin's 'ethnic cleansing' began and all Belarusan activities in the Smalensk oblast territories were forbidden.

During the Second World War the Smalensk territory suffered immensely. In 1941–1943 it was a theatre of war and the majority of the local population were killed or evacuated to the East. Even now in some regions of the Smalesk oblast there are less than 10,000 people. According to data in the year 2000 only 29,000 people considered themselves to be Belarusans. In 1956 Uladzimir Naumaŭ was born in Smalensk. From September 2000

[1] Yanka Kupala (Janka Kupała, July 7 [O.S. June 25] 1882 — June 28, 1942) — was the pen name of Ivan Daminikavič Lutsevič, a Belarusan poet and writer. Kupala is considered one of the greatest Belarusan-language writers of the 20th century. Many of Yanka Kupala's sonnets were translated into English by Vera Rich.

to April 2009 he was an Internal Affairs Minister of Belarus. Meanwhile, in 1964 eight villages and 2,256 hectares of the former Asljansk volost lands of the Mstsislau paviet were joined to Belarus. These were the lands of the kolkhoz «Путь к Коммунізму».

In autumn 1990 a group of delegates of the BSSR Supreme Soviets (including the author of this book) met in Moscow with the Smalensk oblast delegates of the RSFSR Supreme Soviets to discuss a question of certain Smalensk regions rejoining the BSSR, which since the Second World War had been scarcely populated. It was proposed that the victims of the Chernobyl disaster were resettled in these underpopulated areas. This idea was met with understanding and it was agreed to arrange a Referendum somehow, because the Smalensk delegates guessed that the majority of their voters would choose to return to the BSSR...

At the beginning of the 1990's when national liberation movements in the former Soviet Republics were on rise the following fact was interesting: in Alma-Ata[1] the citizens from the Smalensk territories joined the Belarusan community of the countrymen «Baćkaŭščuna» (Homeland) rather than any Russian community. Soon «the developments» in Vilnius[2] followed by

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[1] Almaty is the largest city in Cossackhstan, with a population of 1,348,500 (as of 1 September 2008), which represents 9% of the population of the country.

It was the capital of Cossackhstan (and its predecessor, the Cossackh SSR) from 1929 to 1997. Despite losing its status as the capital to Astana, Almaty remains the major commercial center of Cossackhstan.

[2] On June 3, 1988, the Sąjūdis, a political and social movement to lead the independence and pro-democracy movement, was established. Ukmergė's monument of independence, «Lituania Restituta», restored in 1989. The active nationalist opposition towards the regime culminated in the return of Vilnius Cathedral, formerly used as a museum of fine arts, to the Catholic community on 21 October 1988, followed by the gradual restoration of national symbols, which included the erection or restoration of independence monuments throughout the country. The national anthem of Lithuania and the traditional national Tricolore were legalized in Lithuania on 18 November 1988, officially replacing the flag and the anthem of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic.

Five decades after Lithuania was occupied and incorporated into the Soviet Union, Lithuania became the first republic to declare its independence from the USSR on March 11, 1990, and was later followed by Latvia and Estonia. However, almost all nations in the international community, except Iceland, hesitated to recognize independence for Lithuania until August 1991.

the August 1991 putsch[1] eventually led to the Soviet Union collapse and Belarus became an independent country.

After the collapse of the powerful Soviet Union the economic situation in the Smalensk oblast underwent severe depression. In 2010 a well known Russian historian Roy Medvedev wrote a book about the Belarusan President, Aliaksandar Lukašenka and his economic model as a role model for Russia. In his book he writes of the Allied Powers of the Common State between Belarus and Russia and calls upon them to strengthen the bonds. Interestingly, this is how the author described the economic situation in the post Soviet Smalensk oblast:

«The Smalensk oblast is one of the poorest and is in need of regular subsidy. It has also had bad luck with constantly changing oblast governors and corruption and crime are on the rise. The population is gradually declining, mostly — in country regions, the fields lie untouched and are covered with overgrown grass».

«As early as the 1990s kolkhozes and sovkhozes in the numerous poorer villages of the oblast collapsed, the youth moved to cities and out of the region as well. The surrounding landscape was a distressing scene, of fields unplowed, abandoned and litter strewn, ramshackle houses, dilapidated fences, with piles of rusty scrap metal, skeletons of tractors and combines in the background. The direst situation was on the borders with Belarus in the Demidov, Velezh, Krasny and Rudnya regions».

Incidentally, in the 20th century these regions were most densely populated by Belarusans. Further on the author writes how Belarus helped Smalensk and Bransk to recover. Will the same unenviable fate of Smalensk be in store for future Belarusans when these two fraternal peoples embrace each other in their decision to build the Common State and discard the Belarusan language as unnecessary?

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[1] The 1991 Soviet coup d'état attempt (August 19 — August 21, 1991), also known as the August Putsch or August Coup, was an attempt by a group of members of the Soviet Union's government to take control of the country from Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev. The coup leaders were hard-line members of the Communist Party (CPSU) who felt that Gorbachev's reform program had gone too far and that a new union treaty that he had negotiated dispersed too much of the central government's power to the republics. Although the coup collapsed in only three days and Gorbachev returned to government, the event destabilised the Soviet Union and is widely considered to have helped in bringing about both the demise of the Communist Party and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The Belarusan movement in Smalensk is looking for its own independent way for revival. On March 6, 2013 a regional branch of the Belarusan Language Society (BLS) was opened in Smalensk. Representatives from such Belarusan cities as Viciebsk and Orša also took part in its inaugural meeting. The setting up of the regional BLS organization paved the way for an association of fellow-countrymen of Smalensk, which, strange as it may seem, had never existed before in this city.

The main areas of activity of the BLS in Smalensk will be:

- Learning the native (Belarusan) language; expanding its use in the area through new members of organization.
- Study of culture, traditions and history of the Belarusans who lived here through the centuries and those, who currently live in Smalensk.
- Providing assistance to Belarusans in finding jobs, obtaining education, solving legal and other problems of the region and beyond.

There is the website: www.smalensk.org, which is regularly updated with information about Belrusans of Smalensk and Bransk lands.

At the meeting the Belarusan cultural problems of the region were discussed and also living conditions of the Belarusan population and its perspectives. One of the earliest plans was to develop a website for the association of fellow-countrymen and write a calendar-thematic list of the activities in 2013.

Even today definition of the state border with Russia has not yet been finalized neither has it been practically drawn: some citizens in the Smalensk territories, especially those who live on the border with Belarus, haven't forgotten about their Belarusan origin and the Belarusan language. That is why the history of the Smalensk territories and its epoch-making fate is still waiting for impartial arbitrators.

The author's comment: *Written in July 2007, the Smalensk Street, Gdansk, Poland.*

The Severian Duchy

The ancient Belarusan tribe of Radzimičy, who lived along the shores of the Dzisna River and its tributaries, had the Severians (Сеўрукі) Slavic tribe as their neighbour. In the 11th century the Radzimičy and the Severians lands as well as some land of the Viatičy and the Polyans tribes gradually formed the Čarnihaŭ Duchy. In 1024 Mscislaŭ Uladzimiravič became their first Knyaz.

In the same century such cities as Homiy (known today as Homiel), Čačersk and Rečyca were incorporated into the Čarnihaŭ Duchy; and from 1160 Homiel was the centre of this Duchy.

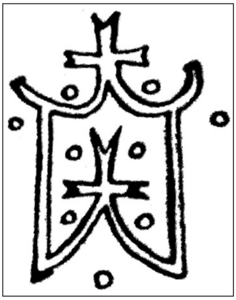
In the middle of 12th century the Knyazes of Čarnihaŭ even owned such Belarusan cities as Sluck, Kleck and Ragačoŭ. The northern lands of the Radzimičy tribe became part of the Smalensk Duchy. Later the Mscislaŭ Duchy was established here as a part of the Grand Duchy of Smalensk. Within the Čarnihaŭ Duchy gradually the Noŭharad-Severian Duchy was formed around 1096–1097 on lands belonging to the Severian tribe and some lands of the Viatičy tribe of Slavs. Oleg Svyatoslavovich was their first Knyaz.

In the second half of the 12th century the Duchy citizens fought against the Cumans[1] (Polovtsy). This event is recorded in the most famous masterpiece of ancient Slavic literature '*The Lay of Igor's campaign*[2]'.

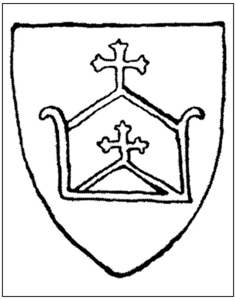
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[1] The Cumans were a nomadic Turkic people who inhabited a shifting area north of the Black Sea known as Cumania along the Volga River. They eventually settled to the west of the Black Sea, influencing the politics of Bulgaria, Serbia, Hungary, Moldavia, and Wallachia. Cuman is an exonym for the western Kipchak tribes living in Central Europe and the Balkans.

[2] «Lay» (full title «The word about the campaign of Igor, Igor, Svyatoslavova son, grandson Olgova» is the most famous monument of ancient Russian literature. At the heart of the plot — the unsuccessful campaign in 1185 Russian princes to Polovechens taken by Noŭharad Seversky Prince Igor's. Most scholars date the Word the end of XII century, shortly after these events (often in the same year 1185, rarely one or two years later).



The Coat of Arms of Raman Mikhailavič of Bransk



The Coat of arms of Andrei Vladimirovich Alelkovich of Bransk. Circa 1446

A masterpiece of Old Slavic literature, an account of the unsuccessful campaign in 1185 of Prince Igor of Noŭharad-Seversky against the Polovtsy (Kipchak, or Cumans). As in the great French epic The Song of Roland, Igor's heroic pride draws him into a combat in which the odds are too great for him. Though defeated, Igor escapes his captors and returns to his people. The tale was written anonymously (1185–1187) and preserved in a single manuscript, which was discovered in 1795 by A.I. Musin-Pushkin, published in 1800.

It was written in 1866 after the unsuccessful campaign and contained a lot other interesting information about ancient Belarus such as the antique city of Garodnya with its fortifications.

From 1238 the Noŭharad-Severian Duchy became a part of the Bransk Duchy. The city of Bransk first appeared in 985 on the banks of the Dzisna River as a Slavic settlement. Its first name was Bryn', later it became — DzjaBransk. The first mention of it as a city of the Duchy of Čarnihaŭ was in 1146.

In 1239 the troops of the Golden Horde ruined and pillaged Čarnihaŭ. Later, in 1246, Knyaz Raman of Čarnihaŭ moved the capital of the Duchy from Čarnihaŭ to Bransk. Eventually, in the 13th century the Knyazes of Bransk were also endowed with the title of Knyaz of Čarnihaŭ.

At that time the residence of the Bishops of Čarnihaŭ was also centred in Bransk. It was Bransk where to metropolitan Maxim moved from Kiev in 1299. However, later, when Bransk was conquered by Smalensk knyazes he moved further on to the city of Vladimir.

However, between the years of 1285–1297 the Knyazes of Bransk became gradually weaker and fell under the power of Smalensk. The supreme power of the GDL was first acknowledged by the Bransk Knyazes in 1339. However, in 1352 they fell under the sovereignty of Moscow, but soon after, in 1360, Bransk rose in rebellion. The allies of the GDL gained victory and Knyaz Alhierd set Raman Mikhailavič, Knyaz of Čarnihaŭ, on the Bransk

throne. The Bransk bishopric reported to the GDL's archdiocese, which was independent from Moscow.

In 2007 a supplemental textbook on history of Bransk for high school was published — «History of the Bransk Duchy: from ancient times till the end of the 18th century».

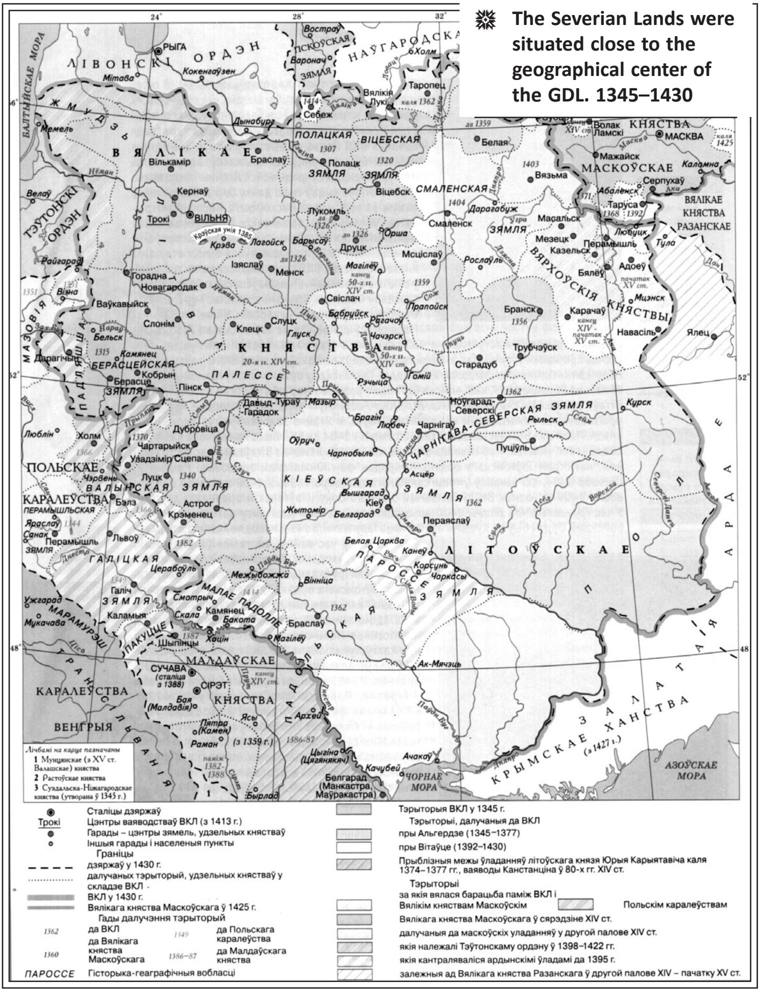
This is how it runs about the way Bransk Duchy joined the GDL: «One shouldn't regard the fact that once Bransk Duchy was part of the GDL as occupation, attack or any other action of aggression. In 1356 Moscow hadn't happened to be a recognized merger of all Rus' territories yet. On the top of it, the Old Russian territories from historic times, such as Kiev, already belonged to the GDL; Gedimin took the title of the Great Knyaz of Rus' and Litva. The Russians played big role in history of the GDL (Litva) — they served in Army, managed big estates on the names of Litvian knyazes, conducted diplomatic Lithuanian. In their genealogical trees the Lithuanian knyazes traced themselves as belonging to the Riurikid dynasty, which ruled in Viciebsk and Polatsk. Gedimin and his successors used as their family coat of arms symbols which were close to that of the Riurikids — trident or bident».

«…Alhierd, son and heir of Gedimin, was twice married to Russian princesses, as an Orthodox believer he financed building of the Orthodox churches and monasteries. Before death in 1377 he took the monastic vows and became an Orthodox monk. He was buried in Orthodox Church. The majority of the GDL elite observed Russian traditions, was Orthodoxies by religion, and spoke Russian language. Chronicles and legal proceedings in the GDL were in Russian».

All written above is the proof that the GDL in the 14th century was considered by Russia as one of the centers of their nation unification, Moscow and Tsver including. This explains why two thirds of the GDL territories were Russian Duchies and people of Rus' lived there in peace, up to their traditions and laws.

Veche of Bransk didn't consider itself to be worse than that of Noŭharad or Pskoŭ and like the later invited Knyaz from the GDL to rule. Recognition of the GDL authority guaranteed Bransk support of the powerful state in breaking through the Mongol yoke and end of paying tribute. That union stopped robbery and violence on these lands.

It is only left to say that the word «Russians» they used in the GDL to call Orthodox Belarusans and later Ukrainians, and the old Belarusan language was called Russian.



The Severian Lands were situated close to the geographical center of the GDL. 1345–1430

The name ‘Belarus’ was first introduced in 19th century by Ekaterina.

At the same time the Great Knyaz Alhierd set Alexander Narymuntavič on the throne in Staradub. During his reign Staradub coins were minted. The technology was borrowed from the Golden Horde: a piece of silver metal was stretched into long strands of wire which were cut into small pieces with scissors and then hammered out.



※ **Coins of Dmitry Koribut of Bransk (bel. Zmicier Karybut of Bransk)**

In 1363 Raman, Knyaz of Bransk and Čarnihaŭ, took the side of Moscow. Alhierd's army occupied the Bransk Duchy and Alhierd's son Zmicier Alhierdavich became their new Knyaz. In 1380 he came to the rescue of the Moscow Knyaz Dmitry Donskoy in his war with the Golden Horde by leading the regiments of Staradub and Bransk in the battle of Kulikovo[1]. Principally, he (together with Andrey of Polatsk and Dzmitri Babroka of Volhyn) initiated the Moscow campaign to cross the Don River to face the army of Khan Mamai[2]. On the Kulikovo battle field Knyaz Zmicier Alhierdavič took command of the first reserve of Dmitry Donskoy's[3] army on the left flank while behind him stood the troops of the war lord of Volhyn. Among the valiant fighters was the monk Alexander Perasvet, who was born in the Severian city of Lyubech and originated from the Bransk boyars, by far excelled the others in personal combat against the Horde.

[1] The Battle of Kulikovo was fought by the Tartaro-Mongols (the Golden Horde) and the Russians. The battle took place on September 8, 1380 at the Kulikovo Field near the Don River (now Tula Oblast) and resulted in a Russian victory.

[2] Mamai was a powerful military commander of the Blue Horde in the 1370s, who resided in the western part of this nomadic state, which is now the Southern Ukrainian Steppes and the Crimean Peninsula. He split apart from Khans of the Golden Horde, trying to establish his own state.

[3] Saint Dmitry Ivanovich Donskoy, or Dmitry of the Don, sometimes referred to as Dmitry I (12 October 1350, Moscow — 19 May 1389, Moscow), son of Ivan II Krasnyi, reigned as the Prince of Moscow from 1359 and Grand Prince of Vladimir from 1363 to his death. He was the first prince of Moscow to openly challenge Mongol authority in Russia. His nickname, Donskoy (i.e., «of the Don»), alludes to his great victory against the Tatars in the Battle of Kulikovo (1380) which took place on the Don River.

The battle resulted in a Russian victory commemorated by a memorial church built from a design by Aleksey Shchusev.

Later, however, Zmicier, Knyaz of Bransk, was killed in the battle on the Vorskla River. Vitaŭt gave the Duchy of Bransk back to Raman Mikhailavič, who returned to the GDL from Moscow; in 1401 Raman was killed in Smalensk. From 1465 to 1500 different Knyazes of Mozhaysk[1] reigned in the Bransk Duchy.



A coin of Alexander Narymuntavič of Staradub with the description in Cyrillic. End of 1360's

The Severian Duchy flourished during the reigns of Alhierd and Vitaŭt, and the cities of Bransk, Čarnihaŭ, Noŭharad-Seversky, Putsiul, Staradub, Trubcheŭsk and Pochap grew rapidly. In Pochap, Radagošč, Rylsk and Putsiul wooden palaces were built, and the Knyaz of Bransk, Zmicier Karybut began to mint coins.

Vitaŭt garrisoned the town of Homiel and Lubeč; Alhierd installed his sons as rulers in these cities as follows: Zmicier Karybut in Bransk, Andrey Vogunta — in Trubcheŭsk, Konstantin Skirgaila — in Čarnihaŭ.

At the same time in the former Severian land the Staradub Duchy had been gaining strength. It was established in 1454, after Ivan Andreevich, Knyaz of Mozhaysk, fled to the GDL from Moscow and inherited the cities of Homiel and Staradub. This was a legitimate inheritance as his father, Knyaz Andrey Dmitrievich, a son of Dmitry Donskoy, married Agraphena, a daughter of the Staradub Knyaz Alexander Patrykeevich. In 1465 Bransk joined the Staradub Duchy, followed in 1496 by Čarnihaŭ and in 1499 by Chocimsk (Хоцімль).

[1] Mozhaysk is a town and the administrative center of Mozhaysky District of Moscow Oblast, Russia, located 110 kilometers (68 mi) to the west from the Russian capital, on the historic road leading to Smalensk and then to Belarus and Poland.

In 1486 the citizens of Bransk rebelled and killed their Knyaz Andrey, who was a son of Ivan, Knyaz of Mozhaysk. From then on Bransk was ruled by the GDL's deputies.

Knyazes of Staradub had courts, boyars and regiments of their own. In 1499 Knyaz Semen Ivanovich Mozhaysky became Knyaz of Staradub as well.

At the end of the 15th century the GDL suffered pressure from the East with the expansion of the neighboring Moscovian Duchy into to the Western territories of the GDL. In 1500 the Moscovian army headed by Yakov Zakhariin conquered Bransk. The Knyaz of Staradub Semen Mozhaysky swore allegiance to Ivan III of Moscovia and together with his Duchy took the side of Moscovia. He also managed to occupy the city of Lubeč and helped in defeating Putsiul.

In autumn 1501 the troops of Shykh-Akhmet, Tsar of the Zavolzhsky Horde, conquered Noŭharad-Seversky and other cities of the Severian Duchy, but had to retreat because they could not wait for support from the GDL.

For a certain period of time, up till 1518, the Staradub Duchy enjoyed autonomy within the borders of the Moscovian Duchy, but later, after the death of Vasiliy, the last Knyaz of Staradub, it fell under the complete control of Vasiliy III of Moscovia. As well as the cities of Bransk, Staradub and Čarnihaŭ, Homiel was also joined to Moscovia.

Historians believe that the humiliation of loosing their lands lead the GDL into the Staradubskaya war between 1534 and 1537. The Army of the GDL was lead by hetman Yury Radzivil/Jerzy Radziwiłł[1]. In July 1535 Homiel was recovered and in the same year — on August 29, 1535 — Staradub was regained. During the attack on the castle at Staradub many prisoners, both soldiers and citizens, were taken. The return of Homiel was met with great enthusiasm all over the GDL, but the inability to retain Staradub came as disappointment. The border between Homiel and Staradub was supposed

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[1] Prince Jerzy Radziwiłł (May 31, 1556 — January 21, 1600) was a Polish–Lithuanian nobleman (szlachcic) from the Radziwiłł family. He was a Catholic bishop and cardinal. Radziwiłł was also an Imperial Prince (Reichsfürst). Raised a Calvinist, Radziwiłł was educated at the University of Leipzig. In 1572 he converted to Catholicism and became associated with the Jesuits. He continued to study at Jesuit colleges in Poznań, Vilnia, and Rome. Even though he was ordained to priesthood and elevated to cardinal only in 1583, Radziwiłł began his duties as Bishop of Vilnia in 1579. He established Vilnia Seminary and helped to obtain university status for the Jesuit Academy in Vilnia. In 1591 he became Bishop of Kraków.

to be an equal distance of 50 versts[1] from each other, but the line was later moved further to Staradub.

Russian archives contain documents dated 1534 to 1536 from Hetman Yury Radzivil's chancery. These manuscripts outline military plans, details of war operations, standards of military discipline, and unique information and facts about the state of military routes and communications and how they were to be repaired, and about bridge construction. The Radzivil's archives from the time of the Staradub War are still waiting for assessment by suitably qualified researchers and analysts from Belarus.

The situation changed to the advantage of the GDL and Rzecz Pospolita only in the beginning of the 17th century, when Moscovia was weakened. In 1618 as a result of the war with Moscovia the cities of Staradub, Pochap, Trubcheŭsk, Noŭharad-Seversky and Čarnihaŭ were regained, but Bransk and Putsiul were still retained by Russia.

Inside the borders of the Smalensk voivodship a Staradub paviet was created, which belonged to the GDL, but the Noŭharad-Seversky and Čarnihaŭ paviets formed the Čarnihaŭ voivodship in Poland under the Polish Crown.

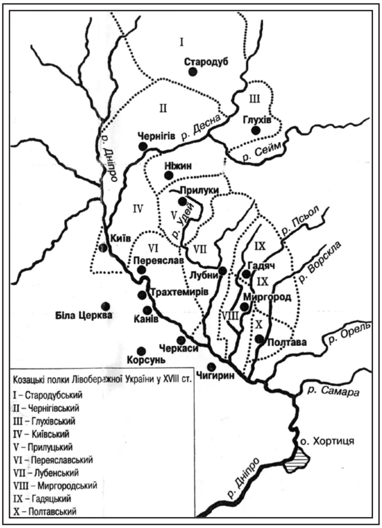
The northern territory of the regained Severian lands, which in 1625 was part of the Staradub paviet, consisted of the districts of Staradub, Pochap and Trubcheŭsk. However, in 1644 the Trubcheŭsk district was joined to Russia, in 1646 the Staradub paviet gained the Loeŭ and Lubeč dictricts of the Kiev viovodship.

In 1648 in a rebellion headed by Bogdan Khmelnitsky[2] broke out in the Crown. His troops besieged Noŭharad-Seversky, which had a large garrison with many nobles. Initially, the Cossacks could not conquer this well fortified city but the nocturnal activities of the local citizens proved a turning point. They dug a tunnel below the castle's wall and let the Cossacks in. Together they killed the city guards and opened the town gates. The city was taken and its garrison liquidated.

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[1] a Russian unit of distance equal to 1.067 kilometers (0.6629 mile).

[2] Bogdan Zynoviy Mykhailovych Khmelnitsky (c. 1595 — 6 August 1657) was a hetman of the Zaporozhian Cossack Hetmanate of Ukraine. He led an uprising against the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth magnates (1648–1654) which resulted in the creation of a Cossack state. In 1654 he concluded the Treaty of Pereyaslav with the Tsardom of Russia, which led to the eventual loss of independence to the Russian Empire.



Position of the Cossack regiments in the Cossack Hetmanate Ukraine, 18th century. (Wiki: Cossack Hetmanate, a Cossack state in the central and north-eastern regions of Ukraine during 1649–1775)

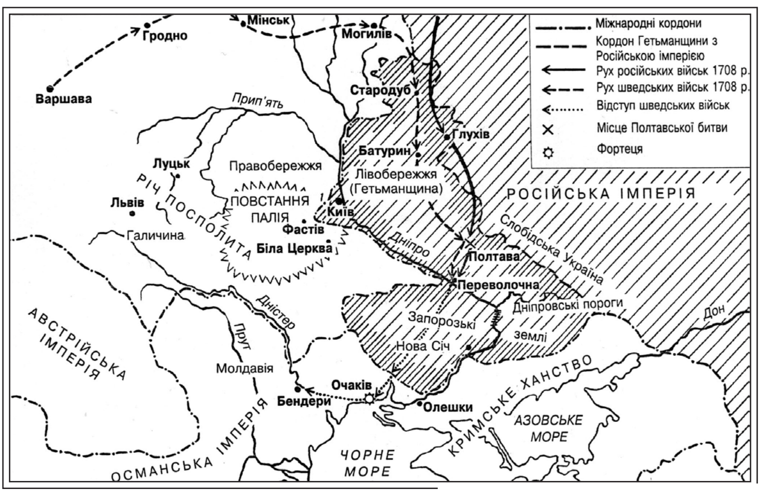
In the same year Staradub was also defeated. However, the local szlachta[1] managed to flee to the West. They were called by a special name of «эзгулянты», preserved their job positions and even gathered to have Sejmiks (local assembly) in different places of the GDL. In 1670 the Staradub szlachta gained Gož paviet and the area of Klevy in the Hrodna paviet as well as some territories in the Kovno and Vilkamir paviets of the GDL. From 1667 they had their Sejmiks in Vilnia, and from 1777 — in Zhykhmory/Zhytomyr of the Trotsk paviet.

In 1648 a regiment of Cossacks was formed in Čarnihaŭ and in 1654 a new war broke out when Russia in alliance with Ukraine attacked Rzecz Pospolita. In 1654 the eighteen thousands Cossacks of the Nežynsk, Čarnihaŭ and Akhotnitsk regiments headed by Ivan Zalatarenka flooded into Belarus. The Russian army led by the war lord Trubetskoy moved from Bransk and defeated Roslaŭ, Mscislaŭ, Dubroŭna and Škloŭ. The Cossacks of Zalatarenka occupied Čačersk and Homiel. In 1667 the Truce of Andrusovo was singed, according to it Čarnihaŭ and Smalensk Voivodships (with the Staradub paviet) were passed to Russia. However, the Severain land became part of the Ukrainian Hetmanate state, which was still part of Russia with an autonomous self-regulation: Čarnihaŭ

[1] The szlachta was a privileged class with origins in the Kingdom of Poland. It gained considerable institutional privileges during the 1333–1370 reign of Casimir the Great. In 1413, following a series of tentative personal unions between the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland, the existing Lithuanian nobility formally joined the class. As the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1569–1795) evolved, its membership grew to include leaders of Ducal Prussia and the Ruthenian lands.

Map of Ukraine at the time of the Bogdan Khmelnitsky Uprising





The Cossack Hetmanate Ukraine incorporated by the Russian Empire. 17th century

and Staradub received the rights to self regulation as well and became centers for the Cossack regiments. The regiments were divided into units of hundreds soldiers with centres in cities or smaller town settlements. The regiments were headed by colonels. In 1708 one of such colonels, Ivan Skarapadsky from Staradub, became a Ukrainian hetman.



Portrait of Ivan Skarapadsky with his signature

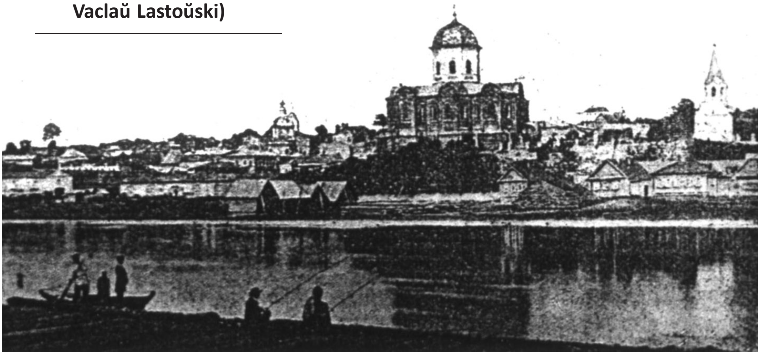
After liquidation of the Ukrainian autonomy, in 1802 the Čarnihaŭ hubernia was created, it existed until 1925. According to the 1897 population census 3,321,900 people lived there, 5% of them were Belarusans. They mainly lived in the Suraž, Mglinsk, Staradub and Čarnihaŭ paviets. The majority of the Belarusans lived in the Suraž paviet (85–90%).

From 1778 the Bransk and Trubcheŭsk paviets populated by the Belarusans belonged to the Orel hubernia. The biggest city of all was Bransk. Arkadz Smolič, a famous Belarusan geographer, considered it to be the most Eastern Belarusan city. Among the Belarusan monuments to the history of Bransk he found the Svensk monastery to be the most widely known and popular with pilgrims from Eastern Belarus.

Inhabitants of these lands had fond memories of being part of the GDL and about their affiliation with the ethnic Belarusan population. So, Edward Vainilovič, President of the Minsk Agrarian Association, wrote in his diary that at celebrations of the 25th anniversary of the Association in 1901 a representative of the Čarnihaŭ Agrarian Association from across the Dnieper River was present, and he was warmly greeted.

By the end of 1917 Ukraine declared its independence. This fact was admitted by the Bolsheviks and the Čarnihaŭ hubernia became part of that country. Shortly after, on March 25, 1918 the independence of Belarus was announced.

Bransk on the Dzisna River (according to Vaclaŭ Lastoŭski)



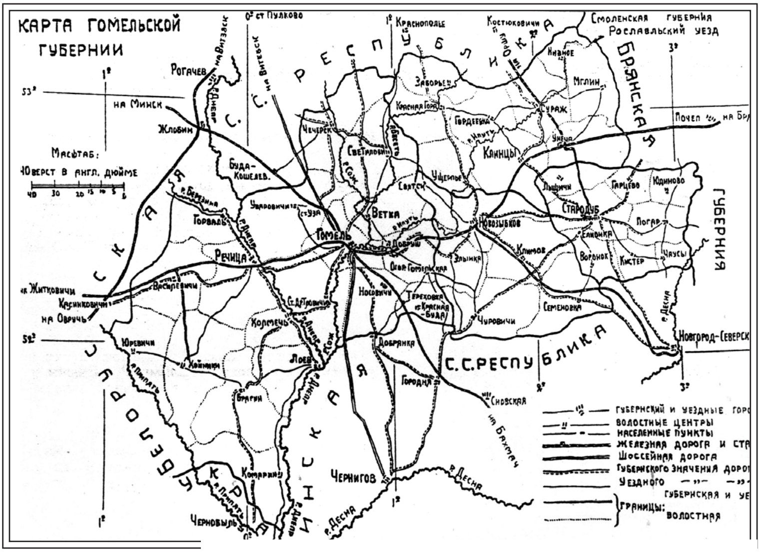
Navazybkava (according to Vaclaŭ Lastoŭski)



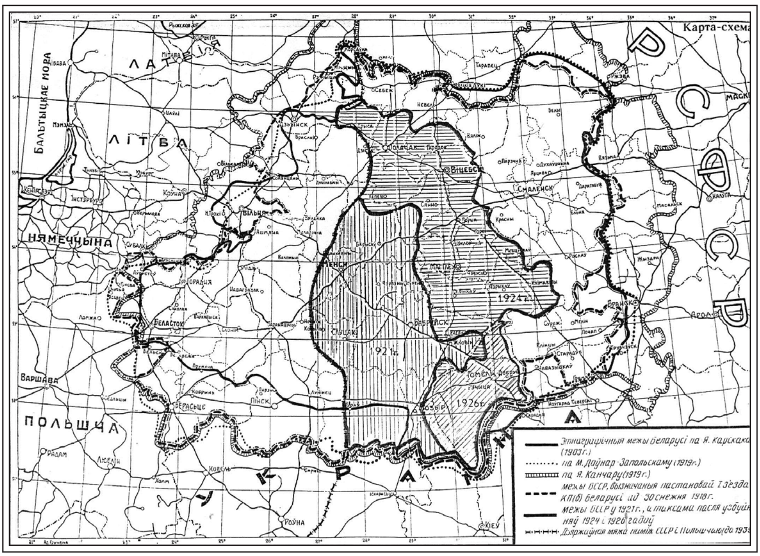
In March 1918 the Čarnihaŭ territory was occupied by the Germans who remained there until January 1919. When the formation of the country of the BSSR[1] had been announced in Smalensk, it was decided to form the Homiel hubenia consisting of the Suraž, Lalinsk, and Staradub paviets.

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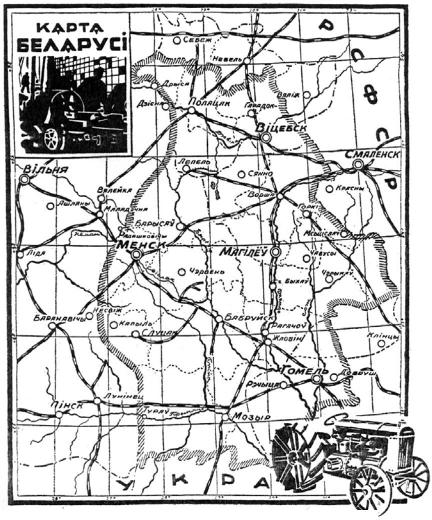
[1] The Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (abbreviated as Belorussian SSR or BSSR) was one of fifteen constituent republics of the Soviet Union. It was one of the four original founding members of the Soviet Union in 1922, together with the Ukrainian SSR, the Transcaucasian SFSR and the Russian SFSR. The Soviet Republic, along with the Ukrainian SSR and the Soviet Union, were founder members of the United Nations Organization in 1945.



The map of Homiel hubernia incorporated into the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic



Integration of the BSSR in 1924 and 1926



The map of the BSSR, showing disputed territories, 1927

This decision was based on the scientific investigations made by Jaŭkhim Karski (see above) and Mitrafan Doŭnar-Zapolski[1]. However, by the end of January the Bolsheviks took away all the eastern territories from Belarus. In 1919 they created a new the Homiel hubernia as part of Russia; it consisted of the Mglinsk, Navazybkava, Suraž and Staradub paviets of the Chervigov hubernia and a part of the Minsk hubernia. The 'Russian' Homiel hubernia existed until December 6, 1926.

After its disintegration the Homiel and Rečyca paviets were passed back to the BSSR. The dissolution of the Homiel hubernia coincided with the creation of a hubernia in the Bransk paviet which included a part of Eastern Belarus. The Bransk authorities laid claim to

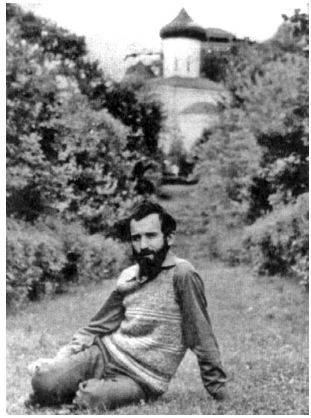
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The Soviet republic in the lands of Belarus was declared on 1 January 1919, but it took a few years to define its status. Belorussia was also one of several Soviet Republics occupied by Nazi Germany during World War II. The end of the Soviet Republic occurred in 1991 and the country was later renamed into the current Republic of Belarus.

[1] Mitrafan Viktaravič Doŭnar-Zapolski was a historian and ethnographer of Belarusan origin. He hailed from the family of land-less smaller nobility and was the son of Collegiate Secretary.

He was the author of more than 150 works on the history of Kievan Rus', Moscovia, 19th century Russia, Lithuania and Belarus, on the social-political movement, peasants' question and the ethnography of Belarus. Notably, the majority of his works were of a scientifical-analytical nature. He extensively sourced his works on the materials from more than 20 archives in Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Kiev, Vilnia, Warsaw, Krakow, Lviv, Kostroma, Yaroslavl', Noŭharad, Nyasviž etc. Many of his works remain unpublished. He was awarded the Order of Saint Vladimir 4th grade (April 1916) for his scientific work.

a paper factory in Dobruš. However, Mikhail Kalinin[1] put forward an objection fearing that such concession would lead to Belarusan demands for other territories with Belarusan populations which were at that time included in the RSFSR. He was referring to the Klintsy district of the Bransk hubernia.



Valier Sliunčanka, Belarus from Staradub

On a map of Belarus, published in 1927 in the newspaper «Zviazda», the Staradub paviet was marked as a questionable territory. In September 1928 the BSSR leaders Ivan Vasilevič and Mikalai Galadzed suggested returning the Navazybkava and Klintsy districts of the former Homiel hubernia to Belarus. But the Stalin regime of terror and repression stopped the process of BSSR expansion to the West and to the East.

Similar to Smalensk, the territories of Bransk also suffered a lot during the Second World War. Then, in 1986 the Chernobyl disaster[2] happened.

However, the Belarusan traditions survived in Bransk. In Soviet times citizens of the Bransk oblast and the Staradub region had initially lobbied to be rejoined with the BSSR. This was unsurprising given the amount of students studying the Belarusan language at Bransk University. By the way,

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[1] Mikhail Ivanovich Kalinin (1875 — 1946), known familiarly by Soviet citizens as «Kalinych», was a Bolshevik revolutionary and the nominal head of state of the Soviet Union from 1919 to 1946. From 1926 he was a member of the Politburo of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, where he was one of the inner circle of party leaders around Soviet leader Joseph Stalin.

[2] Chernobyl is categorized as a city in northern Ukraine, in Kiev Oblast (Province), near the border with Belarus. The city used to be an administrative center of the Chernobyl Raion since 1932. The city was evacuated in 1986 due to the Chernobyl disaster at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, located 14.5 kilometers (9 miles) north-northwest. The power plant was within Chernobyl Raion (District), but the city was not the residence of the power plant workers. When the power plant was under construction, Prypiat, a city larger and closer to the power plant, had been built as home for the power plant workers. After the accident the Chernobyl Raion administration was transferred to the neighboring Ivankiv Raion.



Paviel Jakubovič

the well known architect-restaurateur Valier Sliunčanka, known as the renovator of the famous cathedral of St. Sofia of Polatsk[1], was born in Staradub and was fluent in the Belarusan language.

The Chief Editor of the largest Belarusan newspaper «Belarus Today» Paviel Jakubovič was also born In Staradub. In one of his interviews Jakubovič said: «I was born in Staradub, which can equally be called a Russian and a Belarusan city. It was part of the GDL, but in Soviet times it was part of the Homiel oblast, although it previously belonged to the Russian regions...»

Even in the 21st century lobbies by citizens of the Bransk oblast to be rejoined with Belarus have not subsided. In 2008 public meetings were arranged in a number of regions — they addressed their local Councils with the request to become part of Belarus. In September 2008 a press-conference in Moscow was arranged to discuss the social development problems of the *Belarus-Russian Union State* during which a question was raised about those public gatherings. The Chief Administrator for Information Policy and Social Connections in the Smalensk oblast, Yuri Glebov, proclaimed that such gatherings were insignificant, although, he admitted that the citizens of the bordering regions of Russia had warm relations with the citizens of Viciebsk and Mahilioŭ oblasts of Belarus. Yuri Glebov pointed out that: «What is decided by the local Councils is not regarded as a reason for action. It is not in accordance with the constitution of Russia».

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[1] The city's Cathedral of Saint Sofia in Polatsk (1044–1066) was a symbol of the independent-mindedness of Polatsk, rivaling churches of the same name in Noŭharad and Kiev and referring to the original Hagia Sophia in Constantinople (and thus to claims of imperial prestige, authority and sovereignty). The building of the cathedral had been ruined by the troops of Peter I of Russia. Hence the present baroque building by Johann Christoph Glaubitz dates from the mid-18th century. Some genuine 12th century architecture survives in the Convent of Saint Euphrosine, which also features a neo-Byzantine cathedral, designed and built in 1893–1899 by Vladimir Korshikov.

The Federation Council member for the Vladimir oblast, Evgenii Il'yushin, said that: «The request to give one or another region of Russia to the fraternal Republic of Belarus can not even be considered. Our stance on the borders of Russia is unchanged; they are non negotiable. If such a question were raised, I as a member of the Federation Council would vote against it». *The newspaper «Звязда» (Star), N213, 12 November, 2008.* Nevertheless, the question will not go away!

The Staradub War[1]

Until quite recently the line taken in the mass media was that the brotherly relationship that Belarusans shared with Russians was closer than with any other nation. Many people believed it, if you remember the Tsar, Soviet propaganda and particularly the booklet named People Native to Us from Ancient Times (which was especially famous for promoting that view.) It has to be said that after the recent «gas wars» this sentiment diminished somewhat as at the time of the Ukrainian «orange» revolution an imperial image of today's Russia flourished in full.

That is why it is necessary to look at the numerous Belarusan-Russian Wars of the 16th and 17th centuries, in which the Belarusan nation suffered innumerable losses. The following is a description of one of these wars, which in contemporary Russian historical sources is called the Staradub War.

This war was initiated by the GDL to reclaim the Staradub Duchy. This Duchy was created in 1454 in the appanage of Knyaz Ivan Mozhaisky, who fled to the GDL from Vasil II — the ruler of Moscovia.

In 1499 his son Syamyon, who was officially called the Knyaz of Staradub, obtained legal sanction of his possession of the cities of Staradub, Homiel, Čarnihaŭ, Bransk, Karachaeŭ and Khotiml.

However, in autumn 1500 Knyaz Syamyon in alliance with Knyaz Shamyatsich, the ruler of the Noŭharad-Seversk/Severian Duchy, took the side of Ivan III. They were granted autonomy on the borders of the Moscovian lands, because in the first quarter of the 16th century they, jointly with Ryazan, protected Moscow from the forays of the Golden Horde. In 1518 the Staradub Duchy was taken under the jurisdiction of Vasily III and disappeared as such.

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[1] Fifth war (1534–1537). The Muscovite–Lithuanian Wars (also known as Russo-Lithuanian Wars, or just either Muscovite Wars or Lithuanian Wars) were a series of wars between the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, allied with the Kingdom of Poland, and the Grand Duchy of Moscow.

The reason for starting this war was the GDL's desire to take revenge for all previous wars which had happened up until the end of the 15th and beginning of the 16th century, when huge territories and the large cities of Smalensk, Čarnihaŭ, Staradub and Homiel were occupied.

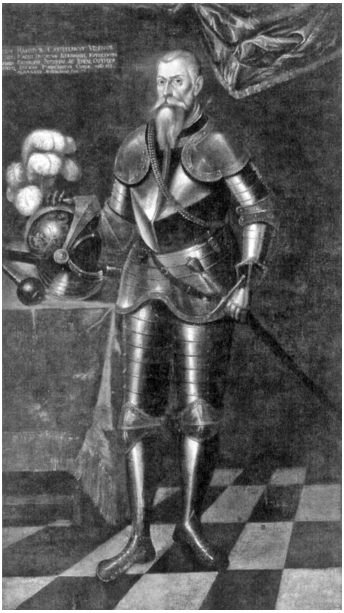
In 1533 the Moscovian Knyaz Vasily III died and by the end of the year the Khanate of Crimea[1] (*Chanat Krymski)* attacked Moscovia.

The General Sojm of Vilnia imposed a 3 year war tax. In the beginning of April 1533 the general military service call up recruited 24,000 soldiers, they were gathered near Minsk. In August Yuri Radzivil's Army of 20,000 warriors reached Mahilioŭ, where they were split into two corps. One of which moved to Smalensk and the other — into the Severain land towards Staradub. Old manuscripts describe those events as follows: «At the beginning the war was hard. The corps headed by Vishnyavetsky failed to take Smalensk. In the Severain lands the Nemirovič division was fighting, but they only managed to conquer the castle of Radagoshch. The army of the GDL had to retreat. In the winter of 1535 the Moscovian army attacked Belarus and reached as far as Braslaŭ and Navahradak, pillaging villages and towns on their way.

Castle of Homiel, Drawing on 16th century map



[1] The Crimean Khanate (or the Khanate of Crimea) was the state ruled by Crimean Tatars from 1441 to 1783. Its native name was Crimean Tatar: Qırım Yurtu. This khanate was by far the longest-lived of the Turkic khanates that succeeded the empire of the Golden Horde.



Jury Radzivil (1480–1541), son and brother of the GDL Chancellors Mikalaj Radzivilavič and Mikalaj Mikalaevič Radzivil. He was a voivod of Kiev, a headman of Harodnya, a commandant of Trocki and Grand Hetman of Litva (1531–1541). He was a professional warrior who for many years fought against Moscovia. On September 8, 1514 at the battle of Orša he led the light cavalry. His son Mikalaj Rudy (Red) was also a hetman and was distinguished in the Livonian war. His beautiful younger daughter Barbara became a wife of the King Žygimont Aŭhust. Yury was the founder of the Lithuanian (Biržajskaja) line of the Radzivil's family. The Battle of Orša was fought on 8 September 1514, between the allied forces of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Kingdom of Poland, under the command of Hetman Konstantin Ostrogski, and the army of Grand Duchy of Moscow under Konyushin Ivan Chelyadnin and Knyaz Mikhail Golitsin. The Battle of Orša was part of a long series of Muscovite–Lithuanian Wars conducted by Russian rulers striving to gather all the lands of former Kievan Rus' under their rule.

To continue the war the GDL hired 5,000 soldiers from Poland and also received support from the Crown's army in the way of 1,000 cavalrymen. At the end of May the army was summoned to the area near Rečytsa. This time they came off best in the fight! In July the Belarusan troops in coalition with the Polish divisions went into the Severian land. On July 16 Homiel broke free with the support of its citizens, who opened the gates of its strongly fortified castle.

The cities of Pochap and Radagoshch were taken later. On August 29, after a month's siege, the city of Staradub was defeated as well, and its warlord Fyodar Auchyna was taken prisoner.

The news of the recovery of Homiel, which had belonged to Russia since 1501, was met with great enthusiasm in the GDL. Žygimont I ordered his deputies from the nearby cities to urgently find professional builders to construct new city fortifications. This must have been quickly affected because apart from Homiel the troops of the GDL abandoned the cities they had taken and returned to their own lands.

However, that was not the end of the Staradub war. Moscovian and Noŭharad troops, sent by the Moscovian ruler, broke into the Polatsk lands and built two castles on the border with Moscovia — that of Sebež and Zavalač and they also erected the castle of Velež on their territory which closely bordered Belarus.

In the winter of 1535–1536 the GDL army set out to conquer Sebež, but failed. In summer 1536 the Moscovians were defeated near Kryčaŭ and the war was practically over. On March 27, 1537 a five year truce was signed, and according to it Sebež and Zavalač belonged to Moscovia, but Homiel and its suburbs — to the GDL. In 1542 the truce was extended with the same conditions for another 5 years.

In 1535, right after regaining Homiel, the Great Knyaz of GDL Žygimont founded the Homiel starastva, as a separate state formation within other ones on the Dnieper River. In 1560 Homiel gained its coat of arms. From 1565 the Homiel starastva became a part of the Rečytsa paviet of the Minsk hubernia. At that time the starastva consisted of the city of Homiel itself and 32 villages ruled by a temporary possessor (dziaržaviec, дзяржавец).

Separate villages were owned by local boyars and szlyachta, but the village of Plyasa belonged to the Homiel Troitsa Church. The village of Slepka was presented to the Catholic Cathedral of St. Stanislaŭ in Vilnia and was part of their court of Strešyn. In 1640 the Homiel starastva consisted of 40 villages with 202 houses. It was connected by a road with Ragačoŭ. It remained this way until the 1st partition of the Rzecz Pospolita[1].

In the Belarusan historic encyclopedia the Staradub war is classified as the fifth war with Moscovia, there is almost no information about it in other text-books. Mikola Ermalovich [2] only wrote a little about it in his book «*Belarusan state Grand Duchy of Lithuania*». A separate book, containing the original details about this war, was recently published by Russian historians.

In 2007 we celebrated 470 years since the first return of Homiel into Belarus; the final return happened in 1926 with the consolidation of the BSSR.

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[1] In 1772 — the first partition of the Rzecz Pospolita (according to the Petersburg Convention dated 1792) among Russia, Prussia and Austria. Joining the eastern part of Belarus to the Russian Empire.

[2] Mikola Ermalovič (April 29, 1921, Dzyarzhynski Raion, Minsk Voblast — March 5, 2000) — Belarusan writer, historian. He graduated from Minsk Pedagogical Institute in 1947.

The Land beyond the Buh River

In his famous book ***The History of Belarus*** **Arkadz Smolič[1] wrote that the country over the Buh River was formed by the Belsk, Bielastok and Brest paviets. Their territories were situated around the Buh River basin and its tributaries: The Narva, Hurtsa, Bobr, Mukhavets and others. The fate of these Belarusan lands is both interesting and dramatic. Our remote ancestors of the Dryhavičy[2] along with the Volhynians [3] lived there from the 10th century. In the second half of the 12th and**

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[1] Arkadz Antonavič Smolič (17 September 1891 — 17 June 1938) — an activist of the national-state revival, a specialist in geography, economics, cartography, Minister of Agriculture BNR (Belarus National Republic).

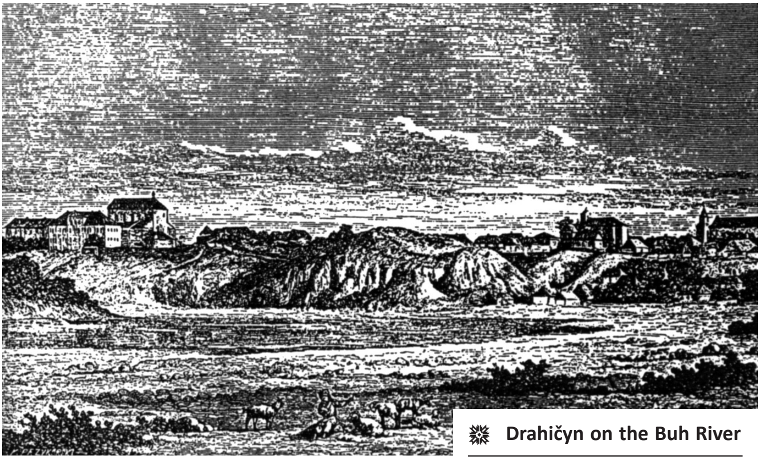
[2] The Dryhavičy were one of the tribal unions of Early East Slavs, and inhabited the territories down the stream of the Pripyat River and northern parts of the right-bank Dnieper river (more exact extents of the tribe's domain are still unknown). The name of the tribe probably derives from the Old Ruthenian word дрегва or дрягва (drehva, or dryahva, which means «swamp») because the Dryhavičy used to live in the marshlands.

The first known reference to Dryhavičy is in the Primary Chronicle, where they are listed among the twelve nations. By the 12th century they were assimilated into the main East Slavic peoples.

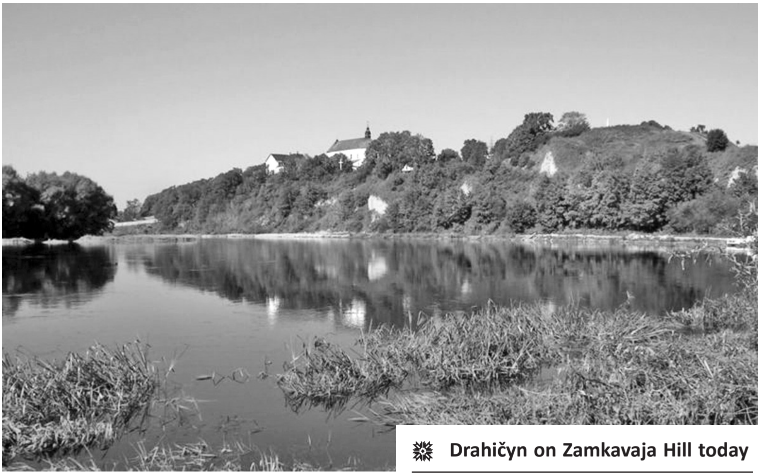
The chronicles do not tell historians much about the Dryhavičy. We only know that they had their own princely rule in the city of Turov. In the 10th century the lands of the Dryhavičy became a part of Kievan Rus and later—the Turaŭ Principality. The northwestern part of the land of the Dryhavičy became a part of the Polatsk Principality.

The Dryhavičy left some archaeological monuments of the 9th and 10th century along the Pripyat, such as the remnants of agricultural settlements and kurgans with incinerated bodies (unlike the kurgans of 11th–12th century with intact bones). There are sepulchral structures that look like small wooden houses with span roofs.

[3] Volhynians (Volyniany) were a tribe or tribal union of Vlachs. They are mentioned in the Primary Chronicle as well as by the Bavarian Geographer.



Drahičyn on the Buh River



Drahičyn on Zamkavaja Hill today

beginning of the 13th century it included the cities of Drahičyn-Nadbužsky, Bransk, Mielnik and Bielsk. Nearby the Baltic tribe of the Yotvingians[1] lived. Further to the west — the Masurians[2]. In the beginning of the 20th century Drahičyn-Nadbužsky was the biggest city, which encompassed the impressive Castle Mountain, which soared 45 sazhen (fathom) or over 95 metres high over the Buh River. On it one could see stone castle walls with the dungeons. In the 19th century Mikalai Avenaryus, the inspector of the Bielastok (Białystok) Women's Gymnasium, excavated that ancient hillfort-settlement and found a lot of leaden seals, which in olden days were attached to different commercial goods.

According to the latter, the Volhynians had seventy «cities» (fortresses) in the last half of the tenth century. Some historians believe that the Volhynians and the Bužans are descendants of the Dulebes, or a few historians claimed the name came from Celtic tribes known as Bolihii before the arrival of Slavic tribes in the 500s AD. The Volhynians lived in the region of Volhynia that covered present-day sections of eastern Poland, western Ukraine and southern Belarus.

Their main cities were Volyn' and Volodymyr (Volodymyr-Volynsky). According to archeological studies, the Volhynians had well-developed agriculture and various handicrafts such as blacksmithing, casting, and pottery. In 981 prince Vladimir the Great subjugated the Volhynians under Kievan Rus. At the end of tenth century the principality of Volodymyr-Volynsky gained dominion over the lands of Volhynians, and later Roman the Great conquered Halič to create the principality of Halič-Volhynia.

Note the term Volhynian was used to name the Poles or Volen, Polen or Polan, but the Poles named them Wolyn or Wolhynske in their language. The name was also used for local groups of non-Slavic peoples that lived in the historic region: Magyars as in Vaelan Hungarians, Vlachs or Volaches as in Volhynian Romanians, and Volhynian Germans as in Wolenes or Wellanes. It's not entirely clear if the Volhynians descended from all these peoples, be it Celtic, Germanic, Magyar and Slavic all put together in the course of 1,500 years.

[1] Yotvingians, or Sudovians (also called Suduvians, Jatvians, or Jatvingians in English), were a Baltic people with close cultural ties to the Lithuanians and Prussians. The Yotvingian language (sometimes called Sudovian) was a Western Baltic language nearest to Prussian, but with small variations.

[2] The Masurians, or Mazurs, or Masurs are a Lechitic sub-ethnic group in the Masovian and Warmian-Masurian Voivodships in Poland. They are descended from Masovians (Polish: Mazowszanie), Polish settlers from Masovia who moved to Prussia especially during and after the Protestant Reformation and were primarily Protestant. In the 1800s the Masuria region of East Prussia was named after the Masurians.

In 12–13th centuries this territory belonged to the Galicia-Volhynia Knyazes. In the 13th century one of them, the famous Daniil of Galicia, was crowned in Drahičyn.

From 1316, in the days of Gedimin, the Land beyond the Buh River was part of the GDL. In those days Gedimin laid the foundations of the city of Bielastok as a small settlement. In 1426 Vitaŭt gave it to Maciej of Tsikotsin (Cikocin — bel). Gradually this territory became known as Województwo podlaskie (Падлессе), which means the land near the great forest known as the Bielavežskaja Pušča[1].

The city of Bielsk was developing rapidly as the center of the Bielsk Land. Second in size was the city of Bransk; in 1493 it was granted the Magdeburg Rights and Pahonia was its Coat of Arms.

In 1498 Knyaz of Navahradak Alyaksandr Chadkevič, voivod and marshalak of the GDL, with the support of Iosif Soltan Bishop of Smalensk founded the friary of the Annunciation in Suprasl[2], which still stands in the Bludaŭskaja Pušča. In 1510 a fortified stone cathedral was built there, dedicated to the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin (Дабравешчання Прысвятой Багародзіцы), and it is a masterpiece of the Belarusan gothic

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[1] Bielavežskaja Pušča in Belarus and Puszcza Białowieska in Poland is an ancient woodland straddling the border between Belarus and Poland, located 70 km (43 mi) north from Brest. It is one of the last and largest remaining parts of the immense primeval forest which once spread across the European Plain.

This UNESCO World Heritage Site and Biosphere Reserve lies in parts of the Brest voblast (Kamianiec and Pruzhany districts) and Hrodna Voblast (Svislač district) in Belarus and on the Poland side near the town of Białowieża in the Podlaskie Voivodship (62 km (39 mi) south-east of Białystok (PL) and 190 km (120 mi) north-east of Warsaw).

[2] The Codex of Supraśl, the oldest Slavic literary work in Poland and one of the oldest of its kind in the world, is named after the Suprasl Lavra. As of September 20, 2007 it is on Unesco's Memory of the World list. The Monastery of the Annunciation in Supraśl, also known as the Supraśl Lavra, is a monastery in North Eastern Poland in the Podlaskie Voivodeship. Today it belongs to the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church and is one of six Eastern Orthodox monasteries for males in Poland.

The frescoes of the Annunciation Church of the Monastery in Suprasl (Supraśl; County Bialystok, Podlasie, Poland) — a fine example of the 16th century wall paintings. The surviving parts were collected and restored after the destruction of the church in 1944. The Murals are kept in the museum of icons (Muzeum Ikon) in Suprasl (a branch of the Podlasie Regional Museum in Białystok).



The Church of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary in Supraśl



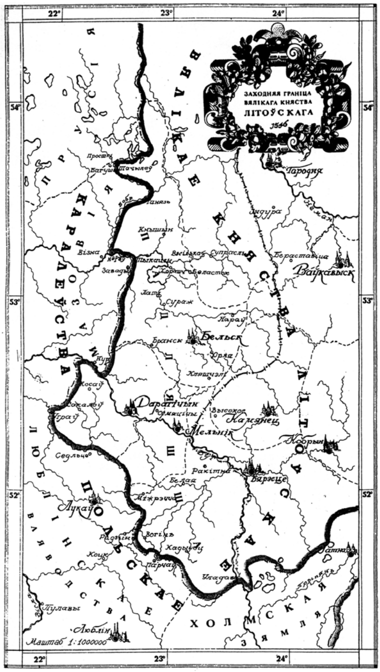
Ruins of the Church of the Virgin Mary in Supraśl, 1944



The Church of the Virgin Mary in Supraśl as a part of the monastery complex in Supraśl today



Frescoes from the Church of the Virgin Mary in Supraśl



Western borders of the GDL as marked on the ground by Jury Radzivil, GDL Hetman

architectural style. The architects of this cathedral creatively interpreted the Polatsk architectural traditions of the 12th century. In 1557 under the guidance of Serbian artist Nectaryi the interior of this cathedral was painted with frescoes.

The monastery became a major centre of Belarusan Orthodox culture. Distinctive religious-philosophical, iconographical and architectural schools were founded, as well as a new style of choral music — the Suprasl chant (suprasĺski raspieŭ). Manuscripts were written in the monastery, jewelry and book binding workshops were opened and a unique library existed. By the beginning of the 17th century the monastery was converted from the Orthodox to the Greek Catholic Church. From 1722 it was the main centre of the Brazilian Order.

In summer 1944, as a result of the war, the main cathedral of the monastery was completely ruined. In 1964–1966 thirty fragments of the famous frescos were taken down from the cathedral columns, conserved and sent to the Bielastok Museum[1]. In 1984 the authorities returned the cathedral ruins to the Orthodox monastery and local Belarusans began building their sanctuary anew. In 1999 the basic building works were finished.

[1] The Historical Museum in Białystok. The facility has a rich collection of archival materials and iconography illustrating the history of Białystok and Podlasie, and a number of middle-class cultural relics, especially in the field of craft utility. There are also the Numismatic Cabinet of the collection of 16 000 coins, medals and securities. The museum is in possession of the only collections in the country memorabilia connected with the Tatar settlement on the Polish–Lithuanian–Belarusan region.

Up to the middle of the 16th century the western borders of the GDL remained unchanged. On the bank of the Leka (Elka) River, where the border of the three countries — the GDL, Poland and Prussia — met, a three sided boundary marker was erected, surmounted by a stone column which carried the Coats of Arms of the three countries.

On March 5, 1569 just before the signing of the Lublin Unia King Žygimont August took over Padlesse from the GDL and incorporated it into Poland (The Crown). They started to call Padlesse — Padlyashsha[1] — to make the fact of its handover from the GDL to Poland toponymically legal. Some time later, in 1584 Pyotr Vesyaloŭski, the new owner of Bielastok, built the stone castle of the Holy Trinity there. But local citizens remained Orthodox and later joined the Greek Catholic Church. In 19th century, when Greek Catholicism was forbidden, citizens of the Bielsk and Bielastok paviets remained Orthodox, but the majority of the population of the Aŭgustoŭ paviet preferred to be Catholics and soon, with the assistance of the Polish clergy, changed their nationality to Polish.

In the 18th century the Bielastok territory visibly flourished. Since 1659 hetman Čarnetski had been granted life time possession of Bielastok after that it was granted to his son in law — Jan Branicki[2].

In 1697 the foundation for a baroque style palace was laid, which, after rebuilding in 1728–1758, was turned into the unique palace-park complex and was called The Versailles of Padlesse. In 1723 Bielastok received the Magdeburg Rights and in 1745–1761 a stone town hall with a clock tower was built there. Shops and houses build of stone arose near by and the city was fortified with a stone wall which had four big gates at the cardinal points (i.e. north, south, east and west]. At that time Branicki's palace had theatre, garden, conservatories, off river basins and two zoological gardens.

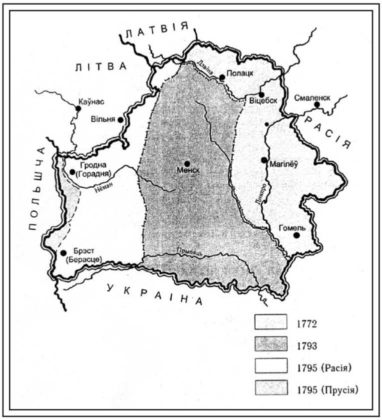
In the settlement of Syamyatičy in the Bielsky paviet Princess Hanna Sapieha built a library, museums of physics and natural sciences, and an-

[1] Województwo Podlaskie.

[2] Count Jan Klemens (Jan Kazimierz) Branicki (21 September 1689 — 9 October 1771) was a Polish nobleman, magnate and Hetman, Field Crown Hetman of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth between 1735 and 1752, and Great Crown Hetman between 1752 and 1771. He was the son of the Palatine of Podlaskie Voivodship Stefan Mikołaj Branicki and Katarzyna Scholastyka Sapieha, the daughter of Hetman Kazimierz Jan Sapieha. Jan had three wives. The first one was the daughter of Court and Grand Marshal Karol Stanisław Radziwiłł, Princess Katarzyna Barbara Radziwiłł, that he married on 1 October 1720 in Biała.

tiquity and a lot of small industries for her village people taking care of their wellbeing.

After the partition of Rzecz Pospolita in 1795 the territory of Bielastok was temporarily given to Prussia. In 1802 Counts of the Potocki family sold this city to Frederick Wilhelm, King of Prussia, for 270,970 Thales. The Prussians cobbled the central city streets, of Bayarskaya and Waršaŭskaya, and built two-storied stone houses on it. The first factories appeared and a market square was created.



The map of the partitions of Belarus shows the Bielastok district incorporated by Prussia

Shortly after, in 1807 after the Tilzit Treaty[1] the city was made part of Russian Empire. In the 1930's the customs border was established between the Russian part of the Kingdom of Poland and Belarus. In order not to pay tax, a lot of Polish manufacturers transferred their factories to Bielastok, which once again became a part of Belarus. In 1857 the city population numbered only 14,000 people, but by 1914 it had increased 6 times. There were about 300 factories employing 6,000 workers. They mainly produced different fabrics, soaps, and made clothes.

Citizens from the western territories of the GDL took the most active part in the rebellion of 1863 for liberation from the Russian Empire.

The leader of the rebellion Kastuś Kalinoŭski[2] was born in the village of Mastaŭliany on February 2, 1838. He was baptized in Jaloŭka. His family originated from the Bielastok region. His ancestors owned the estate

[1] It is most famous because of the Treaties of Tilzit signed here in July 1807, the preliminaries of which were settled by the emperors Alexander I of Russia and Napoleon I of France on a raft moored in the river Neman. This treaty, which created the Kingdom of Westphalia and the Duchy of Warsaw, completed Napoleon's humiliation of the Kingdom of Prussia, when she was deprived of one half of her dominions.

[2] Wincenty Konstanty Kalinowski, also known as Konstanty Kalinowski (Polish), Kastuś Kalinoŭski (21 January or 2 February 1838 — 24 March 1864), was a writer, journalist, lawyer and revolutionary. He was one of the leaders of Polish, Belarusan and Lithuanian national revival and the leader of

of Kalinava in the Bransk region. In 1835 his farther built a textile factory in Mastaŭliany. Valery Urubleŭski, the closest brother in arms of Kastus Kalinoŭski, from 1859 was the Director of the school in the village of Sakolka. He was the most talented leader of the military divisions of the rebellion and the students of this school were the best trained activists. The Bielavežskaja Pušča was the basic gathering point for Urubleŭski's divisions; the hardest battles were fought there. The last divisions of the rebels left it for the Lublin region to continue their fight from Poland.



The Cathedral of St. Nicholas in Bielastok

In the second half of the 19th through to the beginning of the 20th century Bielastok enjoyed its cultural life. A finishing School for girls of high birth was situated there. In 1900 a new cathedral in the neogothic style was built.

Another famous son of Bielastok was Liudvik Lasar Zamienhof (1859–1917). In 1887 he created Esperanto, an artificial language, under the pseudonym of Dr. Esperanto. Soon, Esperanto language societies appeared all over Europe. Although a brilliant idea particularly to facilitate trade and international relations it did not have a lasting legacy. Between 1893 and 1897 Zamienhof also lived and worked in Harodnya, where there is a street named after him.

In 1882 Iosif Rygoravič (Grigorievich) Langbard[1], a famous Belarusan architect, pedagogue and a distinguished figure in the arts and architec-

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the January Uprising in the lands of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania. His coat of arms was Kalinowa.

[1] Iosif Langbard, also Josef Langbard (Bielsk, Hrodna Province, January 6, 1882 — Leningrad, January 3, 1951) was a Soviet Belarus architect and Honored Artist of the Belorussian SSR (1934).



Kastuś Kalinoŭski

ture, was born in Bielsk. From 1932 he lived and worked in Belarus, where he designed a number of the unique buildings in the style of constructivism[1] (the house of government, the main building of the Academy of Sciences of the BSSR, the Opera and others).

Publication of the newspaper «Naša Niva» kicked off a spirit of national revival in the territory of Bielastok. Sadly, this land suffered a lot from the First World War. In 1915 much of its population was forcibly moved to live in Russia or Ukraine as refugees that happened just prior to the German occupation. It was only after 1921 that the refugees got the chance to return home when the territory of Bielastok was handed over to Poland as we shall see later. My father Andrey Ragoŭsky was born in Ukraine in 1916, in 1921 the family retuned home in Navahrudak paviet[2].



Mastaŭliany today

However, during the years of German occupation during the First World War, Belarusan schools were permitted to open. In December 1917 the Bielastok-Harodnya educational district had

[1] Constructivist architecture was a form of modern architecture that flourished in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and early 1930s. It combined advanced technology and engineering with an avowedly Communist social purpose. Although it was divided into several competing factions, the movement produced many pioneering projects and finished buildings, before falling out of favour around 1932. Its effects have been marked on later developments in architecture.

[2] Translator's remark



The Catholic Cathedral in Jaloŭka, where Kastuś Kalinoŭski was christened

46 Belarusan schools, by spring 1918 there were 79, and by the end of 1919 they had grown to 153. Also, under German occupation the cities of Bielastok, Suprasl, Gainaŭka, Krynki enjoyed rapid industrial development with the numbers of working class population quickly growing — the majority being Belarusan.

On March 25, 1918 the Belarus Peoples Republic (BNR) was proclaimed and the Bielastok territory was expected to become part of it. When the Belarus Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) was declared by the Communist Party of Belarus in Smalensk on December 31, 1918, it was envisaged that the Hrodna hubernia, along with the Aŭgustoŭski, Sakolski and Bielastok paviets would be included into it.



Liudvik Zamienhof

Prior to that, on November 11, 1918 Poland declared its independence and immediately laid a claim to neighboring Belarusain territories. The British Prime Minister David Lloyd-George, one of the leaders of the «Big Four», who personally knew many Polish Diplomats, commented at the Paris Peace Conference in Versailles on the reconstituted Poland:

«*Poland was drunk with the new wine of liberty supplied to her by the Allies and fancied herself once more the resistless mistress of Central Europe. Self determination did not suit her ambitions. She coverted*


Josef Langbard

Galicia, the Ukraine, Lithuania and parts of White Russia (Belarus). A vote of the inhabitants would have emphatically repudiated her domination. So the right of all peoples to select their nationhood was promptly thrown over by her leaders.»

The most eloquent defender of such approach to the eastern territories was Roman Dmowski[1], the leader of the Polish National Democratic Party.

On February 5, 1919 the Polish-German Agreement was signed and the German occupation of the Western territories of Belarus (proclaimed BNR on March 25, 1918, then the BSSR on December 31, 1918, after the collapse of the Russian Empire on November 7, 1917) was exchanged for occupation by Poland. In 3 days Jozef Klemens Pilsudski[2] separated the Bielastok district from both the control of the Sejm[3] and the Warsaw authorities and put it under subordination of the Civil Authorities of the Eastern Territories of Poland. This new Polish authority closed the Belarusan schools, which were opened during the years of the German occupation. Some teachers

[1] Roman Stanisław Dmowski (9 August 1864 — 2 January 1939) was a Polish politician, statesman, and chief ideologue and co-founder of the National Democracy («Endecja») political movement, which was one of the strongest political camps of interwar Poland.Though a controversial personality throughout his life, Dmowski was instrumental in restoring Poland's independence. Together with Józef Piłsudski, he is considered one of the foremost Polish politicians of the 20th century.

[2] Józef Klemens Piłsudski (December 5, 1867 — May 12, 1935) was Chief of State (1918–22), «First Marshal» (from 1920) and (1926–35) the authoritarian leader of the Second Polish Republic. From mid-World War I he had a major influence in Poland politics, and was an important figure on the European political scene. He is considered largely responsible for Poland regaining its independence in 1918, after 123 years of partitions. Piłsudski was unable to incorporate much of his Lithuanian homeland to the newly resurrected Polish State.

[3] The Sejm is the lower house of the Polish parliament. The Sejm is made up of 460 deputies, or Poseł in Polish. It is elected by universal ballot and is headed by the Marshal of the Sejm (Marszałek Sejmu).

were arrested, others were moved to Poland, and all school property was confiscated and given over to polish schools.

In March 1921 the Bolsheviks gave Poland all of Western Belarus including Bielastok. The Polish constitution, dated March 17, 1921 guaranteed Belarus nationals minority rights.

In 1931 91.1% of the Belarusans lived in villages of the Bielastok voivodship. It is worth mentioning that quite a large number of them —18,300 — belonged to the working class.

The discharged soldiers of Bulak-Balakhovič's army were moved to live on the territory of the Bielavežskaja Pušča — the majority of them were Catholic.

However, from 1918 to 1924 six thousand of the Belarusan Orthodox refugees returned to live in their native villages.

It necessary to note that Belarusan partisans were fighting against the Poles in Bielavežskaja Pušča. Their movement was most effective in 1924 and some of their divisions had up to 200 soldiers. However, Polish authorities were continually prosecuting them and in May 1923 forty five partisans were brought to court in Bielastok and imprisoned.

In July 1924 the Polish authorities lifted the ban on the use of the Belarusan language in everyday



The Church of St. Nikolas in Bieĺsk Padliaski, built in 18th century, photographed in 1920. Ruined during the Second World War



The Church of the Holy Spirit in Bielastok, 1990

life and allowed Belarusan schools to open. However, it was still forbidden to open Belarusan schools in the Bielsk, Bielastok and Sakolka paviets. Nevertheless in those areas the Belarusan School Fellowship (BSF) still operated. The Bielastok department of this society numbered 526 members; they opened library and a branch of the Vilnia Belarusan Bank. There were different club activities such as choirs, theatres and literature groups. However, in 1935 the BSF was closed by the Polish authorities.

In summer 1924 the Orthodox Church in Poland became self governed and independent from the Russian Orthodox Church, while this is still the case in contemporary Belarus. Orthodox believers in Poland numbered 4.1 million, 32% of them were Belarusan. In 1935 the society of the Polish Orthodoxies was formed in Bielastok, it was named after Josef Pilsudski.

Bielastok integrated into the BSSR in 1939





The People's Assembly in Bielastok votes for Western Belarus to be incorporated into the BSSR and the USSR

It objective was to hold all church services, liturgy and prayers in Polish. The total number of the Orthodox believers of the Bielastok voivodship was 300,000: 62,000 of them were Polish, 20,000 were Russian and the majority was Belarusans.

From September 1939 the Bielastok Orthodox church was under the jurisdiction of the Warsaw metropolite. From 1941 the Head of this church was Bishop Benedict from Hrodna, who dreamed about the Belarusization of the Orthodox Church. The situation remained unchanged until after the war. In June 1948 Moscow confirmed the independence of the Polish Orthodox Church, and thanks to that the Orthodox Belarusans of Poland were very lucky to get their independence as well. As opposed to Belarus — prayers and liturgy are still in Russian in Orthodox churches.



The Belarusan Secondary school in Bieĺsk Padliaski, 1940

On September 17, 1939[1] the Soviet Army crossed into Poland and occupied the Bielastok territory. On September 29 it stopped at the Curzon[2] line.

On October 28–30, 1939 a 'People's Summit' was held in Bielastok with delegates from Western Belarus, where 929 of its delegates expressed their desire to become part of the USSR by rejoining with the BSSR. For the first time in the history of the Bielastok territory the Belarusan language gained state approval and was taught in schools. Books and magazines were published in Belarusan as well. In 1940 there were 270 preparatory schools, several secondary schools as well as the Pedagogical University of Bielastok.

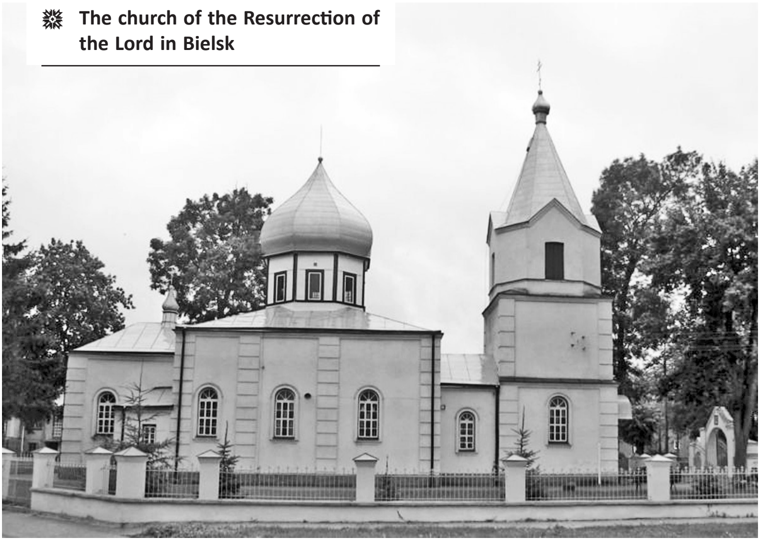
On October 19, 1941 Hitler incorporated the Bielastok territory into the Reich and allocated it to the command of the Gauleiter[3] of the Eastern

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[1] The Invasion of Poland, also known as the September Campaign or 1939 Defensive War in Poland and the Poland Campaign or Fall Weiss (Case White) in Germany, was an invasion of Poland by Germany, the Soviet Union, and a small Slovak contingent that marked the beginning of World War II in Europe. The German invasion began on 1 September 1939, one week after the signing of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, while the Soviet invasion commenced on 17 September 1939 following the Molotov-Tōgō agreement which terminated the Nomonhan incident on 16 September 1939. The campaign ended on 6 October 1939 with Germany and the Soviet Union dividing and annexing the whole of Poland.

[2] The Curzon Line was a demarcation line between the Second Polish Republic and Bolshevik Russia, first proposed on December 8, 1919 at the Allied Supreme Council declaration. The line was authored by British Foreign Secretary, George Curzon, 1st Earl Curzon of Kedleston. In the wake of World War I and the Russian Civil War, the two countries disputed their borders, and the Polish-Soviet War erupted. In July 1920, Curzon asked the Soviet government to accept it as a possible armistice line. Curzon's plan was initially not accepted by the Soviets, as the military situation was at that time in their favour, and later was not accepted by the Poles when the military situation had shifted to their favour. As such, the line did not play any role in establishing the Polish-Soviet border in 1921. Instead, the final Peace of Riga (or Treaty of Riga) provided Poland with almost 135,000 km² (52,000 sq mi) of land that was, on average, about 200 km east of the Curzon line. A close approximation of the Curzon line is the current border between the countries of Belarus, Ukraine and Poland.

[3] A Gauleiter was the party leader of a regional branch of the NSDAP (more commonly known as the Nazi Party) or the head of a Gau or of a Reichsgau. It has since become a term used to refer to any overbearing local official, especially one prone to the dictatorial use of political or bureaucratic power.



The church of the Resurrection of the Lord in Bielsk

Prussia, based in Königsberg (Karalevets). The Bielastok district became a separate administrative unit of Prussia.

In summer 1941 Belarusan collaborators formed the Belarusain People's Committee (BPC) in Bielastok. From 1942 the BPC organized Belarusan and German language classes and concerts, opened schools and encouraged Belarusan folk crafts. In summer 1943 the Belarusan National-Democratic Union was created on the basis of the BPC. Provincial branches appeared in Gainaŭka, Belaveža, Michalova and other places. In 1941–1944 thirty eight private schools were opened in Bielastok territory. In summer 1943 the German authorities closed Polish schools and at the same time allowed Belarusan schools to open in the Bielastok and Sakolka paviets (Sokółka County).

In summer 1944 the Bielastok territory became Soviet again. At the time of the German troop's defeat, the famous fortified church in Suprasl, built in the 16th century, was blown up. The need to return independence to Poland was discussed once again, but this time it happened under quite different circumstances: in different borders and under Communist control.

At the Moscow conference on 19–22 October, 1944 the Polish delegation officially agreed to the Curzon line as Poland's Eastern border, but requested it be moved further east to give them the Bielastok territory with a part of the Bielavežskaja Pušča. Stalin raised no objections to the proposal to move

the border and at the Yalta conference he said that the western border of the USSR had to be drawn along the Curzon line. Stalin's 'Anti-Hitler' allies didn't argue and decided to extend Polish borders at Germany's cost. The German population was forcibly evicted from their lands.

The Polish authorities faced a dilemma: who would live in the former German lands? And again they asked Stalin's permission to allow his citizens who had lived in Poland before September 17, 1939 to move to the «renewed» Polish country. A corresponding agreement was signed and the mass relocation started. Before 1947 1.2 million Poles, 85,000 Jews and 469,000 Belarusan moved to live in Poland. It has to be noted that a lot of Belarusans, from the Vilnia and Hrodna territories especially Catholics, hurriedly registered themselves as Polish nationals just to leave the country of Gulags and collective farms (kolkhozes).

In their turn the Soviet authorities with the Polish authorities' assistance tried to relocate into the USSR and the BSSR the Belarusans from the Bielastok territory and to give these Soviet Polish people the houses of those Belarusans, who left them. By the end of 1946, 36,388 Belarusans from the Bielastok voivodship moved to live in the BSSR. The majority — 12,328 — was from the Bielastok paviet; 10,122 — from the Bielsk paviet, and 9,680 from the Sakolka (Sokółka) paviet.

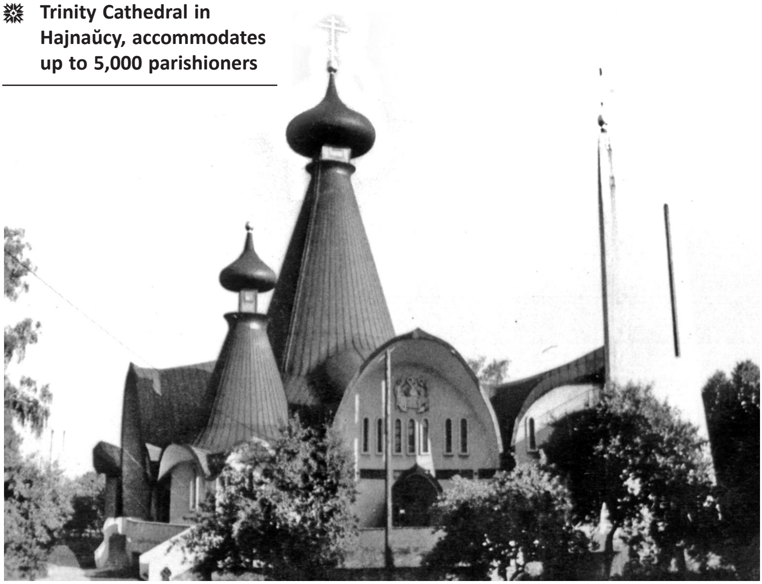
The Krayova Army was of «immense» help in moving people to live in the BSSR. The well armed «Akovtsy» (members of the Krayova Army — the «official» army of the Polish government-in-exile in London) divisions arrived in the Bielastok territory, and killed and injured people; teachers suffered the most, because they taught in Belarusan. They pillaged Belarusan villages and also killed the Jews who had survived the holocaust. However, Belarusans didn't want to immigrate into the Soviet «paradise». Whole villages of Belarusans moved further to the East of the voivodship or to the former German territories, the most — in Gdansk. It is interesting to note that those Belarusans which emigrated to the BSSR transferred or gave their property and land to their relatives or neighbors and that is why the ethnic Belarusan mass was still preserved there.

In 1946–1948 Poland acquired several dozen additional villages from Belarus in the USSR, which bordered Polish lands including Mastaŭliany, the village where Kastus Kalinouski was born. The success of Belarusan schools in the teritory of Bielastok was varied. In September 1944 the new Polish authorities allowed Belarusan schools to open. The Belarusan theatre and music ensemble «Polymia» (Flame) was formed.



The Monastery Complex building in Suprasl today

Trinity Cathedral in Hajnaŭcy, accommodates up to 5,000 parishioners



In October 1944, 115 Belarusan schools and gymnasiums were opened in Bielastok and Gainaŭka and in Bielsk-Podlaski a vocational school (litsei). The parent's wishes were taken into account on the language of tuition and the numbers per class. In total over 8,000 pupil were taught, however, through one school year the number of schools dropped back to 105.

In September 1945 the Belarusan gymnasium in Gainaŭka was closed, because the authorities expected all Belarusans to emigrate to the BSSR.

All Belarusans who were born in the USSR were expelled from the Bielastok territory to the BSSR. The Ensemble «Polymia» was closed in Bielastok. Anyone who wanted his children to be taught Belarusan was branded a nationalist or separatist (as it is today). A few of the Belarusan intelligencia resisted as hard as they could. They wrote and sent letters of complaint to Warsaw and turned to the Embassy of the USSR for support.

As a result on June 28, 1949 Polish communists decided to open Belarusan schools in Bielastok again. In September 1949 in this voivodship 24 Belarusan schools were opened, and by the end of the year they had grown to 39.

In another 20 schools the Belarusan language was taught as part of the curriculum. Belarusan schools (lyceums) were opened in Bielsk-Podlask and Gainaŭka. Belarusan classes were formed in the Bielastok Pedagogical Lyceum. After Stalin's death the position of the Belarusan schools was much strengthened.

In 1956 with the upsurge of the political liberalization in Poland the Belarusan identity could start to emerge more prominently: Belarusan newspaper «Naša Niva» was founded. Also, the Belarusan socio-cultural community (BSCC) was formed and in it the literature and art group «Bielaveža» was organized. Amateur talent groups sprang up, along with social clubs and libraries. The department of Belarusan philology was opened in the Warsaw University. And a weekly magazine «The Belarusan Calendar» was issued. In 1958 Polish radio began broadcasting periodically in Belarusan; from 1990 it broadcasts daily.

In 1951 the town settlement of Hajnaŭka[1], which was known from the 18th century, was declared a city. The majority of its population was Belarusan. A beautiful Orthodox church was built there later; it is the church of

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[1] Hajnówka is a town and a powiat seat in north-eastern Poland (Podlaskie Voivodship) with 21,583 inhabitants (2009). It is the capital of Hajnówka County. The town is also notable for its proximity to the Białowieża Forest, the biggest primaeval forest in Europe. Through Hajnówka flows river Leśna

the Holy Trinity — the site of the annual inter-religious festival of church music.

In 1984, at the instigation of the BSCC, a museum of Belarusan culture was established there. Building of the museum began in 1968 and on October 27, 1990 the first public exhibition of 300 exhibit items was held. Nowadays the museum consists of the three buildings with six exhibition halls, cinema, library, and hotel; its total area is 2,700 m^2. The museum exhibition includes agricultural tools, folk and art cultural heritage of Belarusans in Poland.



The choir named after Šyrma at the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in Hajnaŭka

In 1981 the Belarusan Students' Community (BSC) was formed, it took students from Warsaw and Bielastok. When the status of the military state was announced in Poland, the BSC went underground.

On December 17, 1988 the first assembly of the BSC took place. Apart from Bielastok, groups of the BSC operated in Warsaw, Gdansk, Lublin, and Olsten. On February 10, 1990 the political party of Belarusans was established, it was named «The Belarusan Democratic Union» (BDU). After Poland joined the European Union the rural population began to receive subsidies for growing ecologically clean products.

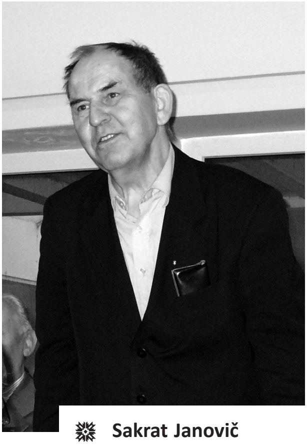
In his book «Essay on History of the State of Poland and its People. Centuries: 10^{th}–21^{st}», published in 2005, the Polish history researcher Marian Semakovič wrote that at the time the book was written between two and three thousand Belarusans lived in Poland.

According to the 2011 census the Belarusan population was considerably less numerous because the assimilation process went much faster

Prawa. It is one of the centres of Orthodox faith and a notable centre of Belarusan culture (26,41% in town) in Poland.



Zośka Vieras



Sakrat Janovič

than expected due to the fact that the majority of young Belarusans living in the country moved into the cities.

Yet, the Belarusans of Bielastok are much more active now regarding their national problems. From 2007 they turned to use Polish law «On National and Ethnic Minorities and Regional Languages». The urban commune of Hajnaŭka was the first to introduce the Belarusan language as an alternative language; later, the urban communes of Orlja, Naraŭka, Cyzy and the others took up this initiative as well. In 2011 the authorities of the Orlja urban commune, where the number of Belarusans is as much as 70%, were the first to put up road signs and settlement names in both languages — Belarusan and Polish.

Now, the Belarusans of Poland can freely travel, work and study in any country of the EU (no visa needed!).

Many famous people originate from the Bielastok region such as the Belarusan writer Aliaksei Karpjuk, Lenik Tarasievič, a Belarusan artist famous in Poland and worldwide, the Roman Catholic priest Jerzy Papjaluška, Yan Čykvin — delegate of numerous Sejms, Sakrat Janovič — writer, Mikola Gaiduk — historian, writer and folklorist, Aleg Latyšonak.

In Bielastok «Radio Racija» broadcasts in the Belarusan language. Coverage reaches the 2,500,000 people that live along the extensive Polish-Belarusan boarder.

Central Lithuania

In the 20th century, after the collapse of large empires such as that of the Russain Empire and Austro-Hungary and totalitarian countries in Europe and other continents of the world, a lot of new countries appeared on the world map. Alongside them other unrecognized puppet, countries also briefly appeared.

However, it may be said that it is better to have a country even if it is only a puppet of another, than to live under occupation or be a part of another country, even if that latter is a democratic one.

After the end of World War I and the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917, nascent countries began to emerge within the territory of Belarus. Attempts were made by both the Bolsheviks and the Polish authorities to create such countries with varying degrees of success. The Lithuanian-Belarus Soviet Socialist Republic (LitBel[1]) also known as the state of Central Lithuania was one such.

Since the BNR (Belarus Peoples Republic) had been declared on March 25, 1918 in Minsk and after the German troops retreated from Belarus territories, on January 1, 1919 the Bolsheviks had to proclaim the BSSR in the ethnic borders of the Belarusans' resettlement. This happened in Smalensk.

However, as early as January 16, 1919 the Smalensk, Mahilioŭ and Viciebsk territories (regions) had been taken back by the Bolsheviks and incorporated into Soviet Russia. Shortly after, on February 27, a new country of LitBel with its capital in Vilnia was established. LitBel consisted of the Vinya, Hrodna and Minsk hubernias. These were those territories of the country, which until the middle of the 19th century had been covered by the

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[1] Lithuanian–Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, or LitBel, was a Soviet-controlled republic that existed within the territories of modern Belarus and eastern Lithuania for approximately seven months during 1919, before the western parts of the areas were annexed by Poland.

Following the end of World War I in November 1918, the German Army left the area, and on 1 January 1919 the Soviet Socialist Republic of Belarus was declared, part of which, in combination with the Lithuanian SSR, formed the LitBel from 27 February 1919.

historic name of Litva. All traces of the Belarusan nation were forbidden in this Soviet country of LitBel; this country's Army consisted mainly of Russian soldiers. Apart from its government leader Vikentii Mickevičius-Kapsukas, this country was entirely separate from Lithuania. The Bolsheviks created LitBel purely as a vehicle to attack Poland. In June 1919 the LitBel army numbered 17,450 Red Army men.

On February 14, 1919 the war between Poland and Soviet Russia began with the battle between the Bolsheviks and the Polish army which took place near Biaroza Kartuzska[1]. By April 19 Polish army had occupied Vilnia and on April 28 they took Hrodna. The Government of LitBel moved to Minsk, but on August 8 the Polish army divisions, led by Army General Stanislaŭ Shatski, took control of Minsk and the country of LitBel slipped out of existence.

During 1918–1919 the Belarusan's neighbors, the Lithuanians, had been steadily building up their country. In the beginning they were assisted by Germany and later by countries of the Atlanta Union. Initially the Bolsheviks were unhappy about this, but later, after LitBel had been occupied by Poland, they changed their mind. Henceforth Lithuania was seen as their ally in their continuing struggle with Poland.

On September 11, 1919 the government of Soviet Russia agreed to recognize Lithuania as a country and the two countries signed a joint Peace Treaty. This is why on July 12, 1920 Lenin acknowledged independence of Lithuania and gave over to it the Vilnia area, which had long been occupied by Poland, plus the Belarusan cities of Harodnya, Ščučyn, Lida, Ašmiany, Smarhoń and Braslaŭ. On July 14 the Red Army occupied Vilnia, and in September handed it over to the Lithuanians. On July 31, 1920 the Soviet Socialist Republic of Belarus was announced in Minsk, but only within the borders of the former Minsk hubernia.

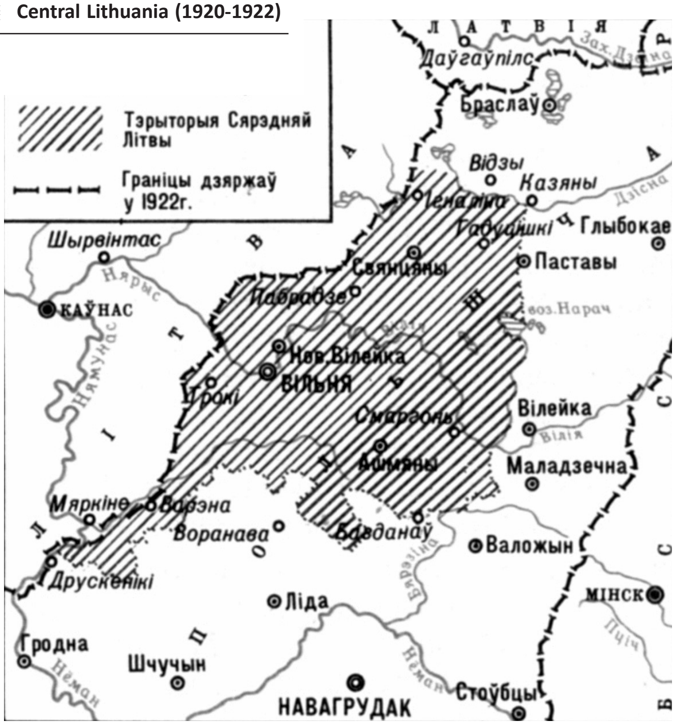
In 1919–1920 the government of Poland refused to recognize the BSSR and LitBel, despite the RSFSR[2] government claims that their territorial disputes should be settled directly between Poland and the BSSR. Poland continued military action against Lithuania. They wished to defeat not only

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[1] Biaroza is a town of 31 000 inhabitants (1995) in Western Belarus in Brest voblast, center of the Biaroza rayon.

[2] The Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic and the RSFSR for short, was the largest and most populous of the fifteen Soviet republics of the Soviet Union. It was by far the largest sub-national entity in the world by area and second in population after the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. The capital was Moscow, which also served as the capital of the Soviet Union.

Central Lithuania (1920-1922)



the Vilnia area but the entire country. On October 7, 1920 under pressure from the Triple Entente (Antanta) the Suvalki Agreement between Poland and Lithuania was signed. As part of this, Poland recognized the Lithuanians' rights to the provisional administration of Vilnia and its territories. However, Jozef Klemens Pilsudski, a native of the Vilnia area, was not prepared to give away his motherland to Lithuania. After agreeing terms with the Antanta, he skillfully played the Belarusan card. He fomented a revolt against the Suvalki Agreement in the Polish part of the Army — the Lithuanian-Belarusan Divisions. These Divisions[1] had originally been created in 1919 as part of in Polish Army and consisted mainly of the Belarusan

[1] The 1st Lithuanian-Belarusan Division consisted of Suvalki, Hrodna, and Vilnia and Minsk regiments. By the end of September, just before a coup was to happen, the two strongest regiments of the 2nd Lithuanian-Belarusan Division,



The Cross of Merit of Central Lithuania depicting 'Pahonia' (1920) awarded to the troops

Catholics from Western Belarus of the Bielastok and the Vilnia areas. They were unwilling to serve in the Army of the Crown of Poland, and preferred to join the Lithuanian-Belarusan Divisions instead, continuing the tradition of Lithuanian, i.e. Belarusan, separatism.

On October 8, 1920, the day after the signing of the Suvalki Peace Treaty, the 1st Lithuanian-Belarusan Division lead by Liucyjan Žalihoŭski[1] revolted. The next two paragraphs describe what happened and are taken from Wikipedia:

In October 1920 Žalihoŭski, a native of historical lands of Lithuania, was chosen to command the 1st Lithuanian-Belarusan Infantry Division, composed mainly of

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those of Lida and Koŭna, were transferred to 1st Lithuania-Belarusan Division by the order of Pilsudski.

The 2nd Lithuanian-Belarusan Division was a unit of the Polish Army formed in July 1919 from parts of the 1st Lithuanian-Belarusan Division during the Polish–Soviet War. The division suffered heavy casualties during the Soviet invasion in summer 1920; some soldiers were forced to retreat into Lithuanian territory where they were interned. The division was soon recreated and renamed to the 20th Infantry Division. It temporarily returned to the old name after Žalihoŭski's Mutiny, when it became part of the military of the Republic of Central Lithuania.

[1] Lucjan Žalihoŭski (1865–1947), was a Polish general, and veteran of World War I, the Polish-Soviet War and World War II. He is mostly remembered for his role in Žalihoŭski's Mutiny and as head of a short-lived Republic of Central Lithuania. Lucjan Žalihoŭski was born October 17, 1865, in Oszmiana (modern Ašmiany in Belarus) to Gustaw and Władysława née Traczewska.

P.O.W. members, volunteers and partisans from the territory of modern Belarus and Lithuania. On October 8, 1920, after a staged coup, he defected with his unit and took control over the city of Wilno (modern Vilnius, Lithuania) and its area. The coup, named after him, would be remembered as the defining moments of his life. On October 12 he proclaimed independence of the said area as Republic of Central Lithuania, with Wilno as its capital. Initially a *de facto* military dictator, after the parliamentary elections he passed his powers to the newly-elected parliament, which in turn decided to submit the area to Poland.



General Liucyjan Žalihoŭski (Lucian Žalihoŭski)

Žalihoŭski's Mutiny (Polish: *Bunt Žalihoŭskiego* also *żeligiada*) was a sham mutiny led by Polish General Žalihoŭski in October 1920, which resulted in the creation of the short-lived Republic of Central Lithuania. Polish Chief of State Jozef Pilsudski had surreptitiously ordered Žalihoŭski to carry out the operation, and revealed the truth several years later. This



The street named after General Žalihoŭski in Lida, it kept his name up to January 9, 1940

operation paved the way for the Polish annexation of Vilnia, and the Vilnia Region, two years later.

Žalihoŭski occupied Vilnia, announced the independence of the Vilnia lands and headed to Koŭna. En route he also took the town settlement of Keidany. It was not until he reached the Šervintas region that the Lithuanians managed to stop his progress. The international community was unable to blame Poland since it appeared that an incident involving only Belarus and Lithuania had taken place.

On October 12 Žalihoŭski announced the independence of Central Lithuania and became its official leader. Later he became the Minster of the Military affairs of Poland and until 1939 he was a member of the Polish Sejm. After 1939 he emigrated and supported the Polish government in exile. Until January 9, 1940 the Belarusan city of Lida had a street named in his honor. He died in 1947. Ironically enough, this street is named now after Feliks Dziaržynski (Felix Dzerzhinsky)[1], who was also a native of Belarus.

This new country of Central Lithuania consisted of 10 paviets. Apart from Vilnia the other major cities were Troki, Smargon and Ašmiany. The Poles refused to give Harodnya and Lida to Žalihoŭski and immediately incorporated these cities into Poland. At that historic period 530,000 people lived in Central Lithuania, 40% of whom were Belarusans. The power was in Žalihoŭski's hands; and he gave major leading positions in the government only to the Krajowcy[2]. Žalihoŭski handed over his government to a

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[1] Felix Edmundovich Dzerzhinsky was a Communist revolutionary, famous as the founder of the Bolshevik secret police, the Cheka, later known by many names during the history of the Soviet Union. The agency became notorious for large-scale human rights abuses, including torture and mass summary executions, carried out especially during the Red Terror and the Russian Civil War. Dzerzhinsky was born into a Polish szlachta (noble) family of the Samson coat of arms in the Dziarzhynava estate near Ivyanets and Rakaŭ in Western Belarus (in present-day Minsk Voblast), then part of the Russian Empire. As an irony of history, one of the older students at this gymnasium was his future archenemy Jozef Pilsudski. Years later, as Marshal of the interwar Polish state, Pilsudski generously recalled that Dzerzhinsky «distinguished himself as a student with delicacy and modesty. He was rather tall, thin and demure, making the impression of an ascetic with the face of an icon. Tormented or not, this is an issue history will clarify; in any case this person did not know how to lie».

[2] The Krajowcy (the «Fellow Countrymen» or «Natives» meaning fellow citizens of former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Lithuanian: krajovcai, Belarusan: Краёўцы) was a group of mainly Polish-speaking intellectuals

temporary Ruling Commission headed by V. Abramovich, who was one of the Krajowcy and stood for the federal state like the former Rzecz Pospolita. They had their own money Polish Zloty and country symbols; their own awards and postal stamps.

The coat of arms of Central Lithuania is a shield divided in half with a crowned white eagle on the left and a charging knight with raised sword on the right. This symbol is also used on the red flag.

On February 25, 1922 the Army Cross of Merit of Central Lithuania was approved by Sejm of Vilnia. In 1926 it was also used in Poland to award officers who fought in the Belarus-Lithuanian division from October 9 to November 19, 1920. By the end of 1926, 1439 medals had been awarded and those receiving it included Marshal Pilsudski, and Generals Žalihoŭski and Sikorski. This merit award is now a collector's item, originals are very rare but it has been much copied.



Postage Stamp of Central Lithuania

The first stamps were published on October 20, 1920 and depicted two coats of arms: The Belarusan Pahonia and The Polish Eagle. Stamps issued in 1920–1922 depicted historic and architectural monuments of Vilnia (St. Anne's Church[1] and Vostra-

from the Vilnius Region who, in the beginning of the 20th century, opposed the dividing of the old Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth along ethnic and linguistic lines. They were mostly descendants of the nobles of Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Lithuanian nobility in some cases part of the szlachta) but identified themselves with Polish culture and maintained a sense of loyalty to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and to the Commonwealth. However, they did not support the Polish federalists who dreamed of resurrecting the Commonwealth and thought of the Grand Duchy as an integral part of Poland. Krajowcy consisted of two wings: the moderate wing, consisting mostly of landowners, and the democratic wing, consisting of Vilnius' intelligentsia.

[1] St. Anne's Church is a Roman Catholic church in Vilnius' Old Town, on the right bank of the Vilnia River. It is a prominent example of both Flamboy-



Branislaŭ Taraškievič — the head of the Belarusan sector in the department of education of Central Lithuania

ya Brama[1] among them), portraits of Queen Jadviha and King Jahajla, Tadevuš Kaściuška and Adam Mickiewicz. Stamps with Žalihoŭski's portrait were published several times. In November 1921 a special stamp depicting Žalihoŭski's Army entry into Vilnia on October 9, 1920 was issued.

Žalihoŭski, unlike the other government officials of Poland, was positive about the main role of Belarusans in the country. Leaders of the BNR Higher Rada unlike the Belarusan government in Koŭna headed by Lastoŭski supported the new authorities of Central Lithuania. An attempt was even made to name this new country — Western Belarus, — but that proposal was unsuccessful.

Žalihoŭski's government was supported by Anton Luckevič, Arkadz Smolič, Branislaŭ Taraškievič, Maxim Garecki and Adam Stankevič, a Roman Catholic priest. Taraškievič was the Belarusan section Chief in the educational department of Central Lithuania's government. In 1921 Anton Luckevič established a Belarusan museum named after Ivan Luckevič[2], Taraškievič organized a Fellowship of Belarusan School (FBS). The Belarusan Gymnasium was opened in Vilnia

ant Gothic and Brick Gothic styles. St. Anne's is among the features of Vilnius Old Town that enabled the district to be included in the list of UNESCO World Heritage sites.

[1] The Gate of Dawn was built between 1503 and 1522 as a part of defensive fortifications for the city of Vilnia. It has also been known as the Medininkai Gate, as it led to the village Medininkai south of Vilnius as well as Aštra broma, which derivative for the Lithuanian language word aštra meaning sharp. Of the nine city gates, only the Gate of Dawn remains, while the others were destroyed by the order of the government at the end of the 18^{th} century.

[2] Luckevič brothers — Ivan and Anton — are Belarusan public and political figures of 1st half of the 20 century.

and the Teacher's Belarusan Gymnasium — in Baruny (Ašmiany)[1]. In spring 1921 there were 186 Belarusan Schools in Central Lithuania.

Yanka Kupala watched the Vilnia events with great interest. In 1919 he published the article «*Resurrection of the Polish University in Vilnia*» in the Newspaper «Zvon». In it he described Vilnia as a disputed city since claims to own the city were made by three countries: Belarus, Poland and Lithuania.

While continuing to have disputes about Vilnia and its territories in the League of the Nations, Poland tried to prove that it acted fairly regarding its national minorities. After the signing of the Riga Treaty 400 Belarusan preparatory schools were active in Western Belarus, and 7 graduate schools plus three Teacher's Seminaries. Poland contributed to Belarusan cultural life and to Belarusan national publications. The Central Lithuanian country had an independent judicial system. However, it was overly dependent on financial loans from Poland and its economic situation, using the same currency — the Polish Mark. As a tangible achievement in 1921 an electrification project was developed, by which time the country had demand in it with 432 major industrial and about 1,370 minor production plants.

However, the majority of the population was involved in agriculture. Prior to 1923 in the Vilnia area 961 plots of land were allocated for the resettlement of Polish colonists (асаднікаў) there. In addition, each of the 6,470 farmsteads, belonging to retired military men and activists from all sorts of organizations, received an average 2.5 hectares of land. Only Polish nationals were entitled to buy land, or those who, on the grounds of being Catholics, registered themselves as Polish. Some villagers were resettled to isolated farmsteads.

When the Vilnia territories were occupied by Žalihoŭski, Central Lithuania broke off diplomatic relations with Poland and the two countries continued in a state of war until September 1939. The country was supported by the BNR government in Koŭna, headed by Lastoŭski, and Moscow. Elections for the Sejm of the new country were due to take place on January 9, 1921, but a protest came from the League of Nations; it was proposed that a referendum would be held, otherwise it threatened to introduce foreign troops in the country.

However, this decision was disputed by the Lithuanians and the Bolsheviks. Negotiations were held in Brussels and Geneva. Mr. Gimans,

[1] The Belarusan Latin alphabet, or Lacinka, is the common name of the several historical alphabets to render the Belarusan (Cyrillic) text in Latin script.



General Stefan Makrecki, Acting Chairman of the Interim Management Committee of Central Lithuania

Foreign Minister of Belgium, made a proposal to donate the Vilnia territories to Lithuania on the basis of autonomy and to incorporate Lithuania into the military and economic union with Poland (quite analogical to the contemporary Union of Belarus and Russia). However, Lithuania was against that decision.

Poland was constantly putting pressure on Žalihoŭski to make the Central Lithuanian state part of Poland. On January 16, 1921 General Adam Makrecki (born on the estate of Dzitryki of the Lida paviet of Belarus) was appointed Acting Chairman of the Interim Governmental Commission of Central Lithuania. He was loyal to Poland. Before that he was in charge of the 1st corps of the Army of Central Lithuania and headed military actions on the Lithuanian front line up to the cessation of arms. Makrecki performed his duties of Acting Chairman of the Interim Governmental Commission up to November 21, 1921, when Alyaksandar Myaištovič was appointed to be Chairman of the Commission. On November 30, 1921 Žalihoŭski passed all power to Myaištovič and left Vilnia for Poland.

At the end of 1921 the Belarusan Nation Committee in Vilnia refused to take part in the elections to be held on January 8, 1922 and set up a boycott. The boycott was supported by local Lithuanians for their own reasons. The result of the elections was that 64.4% of electorate voted for pro-Polish delegates only. On February 20, 1922 the new Sejm of Central Lithuania made a decision to be joined to Poland. The League of Nations supported them in their decision. On March 24 this was confirmed by the Polish Sejm and the country of Central Lithuania ceased to exist.

On April 6, 1920 Central Lithuania was incorporated into the Vilnia territories/governance with voivodship rights. In December 1925 it was called the Vilnia voivodship; in its 9 paviets of it the Belarusan population was in majority.

However, memories of Central Lithuania continued to live in people's minds and hearts. For example, in 1926 the daughter of General Adam Makrecki, Camilla Makreckaya, wrote a poem entitled «*The Year 1919, or*

The Song of the Belarusan-Lithuanian Divisions». In this poem she described the indigenous moods of the locals.



St. Anne's Church in Vilnia

The Soviet government was intent on liquidating Central Lithuania, and later, when this plan was realized, refused to recognize the fact that the former country was joined to Poland. Up to the end of 1930s the Belarusan territories including Vilnia, which according to the agreement of July 12, 1920 were given by the Soviet Russia to Lithuania, had always been shown as Lithuanian lands on the Soviet maps. The Polish Government managed to obtain international recognition that the Vilnia territories belonged to Poland. This happened on March 15, 1923 at the International Conference of ambassadors from the Great Britain, France, Italy and Japan, which recognized the Eastern borders of Poland, including the border between Poland and Lithuania. The conference decision was rejected by Lithuania and the USSR.

In September 1939 Soviet troops entered the capital of Western Belarus — Vilnia — and the Vilnia territories were about to be incorporated entirely into the Republic of the BSSR. However, on October 10 the Soviet government passed the city of Vilnia and a large portion of the Vilnia territories (7,120 km^2 populated by 457,000 people) to Lithuania. Belarusans only learnt about it on November 1, 1939 after the elections to the Peoples Assembly of Western Belarus took place. On November 2 Vyacheslav Molotov, Commissar of the Foreign Affairs of the USSR, told the Supreme Soviets: *The Vilnia territories belong to Lithuania although not by virtue of its population. We know that the majority who live there is not Lithuanian, but the historical past and the strivings of the Lithuanian people are closely connected with Vilnia and the USSR government has decided that it is necessary to meet their expectations*.

In the USSR the country of Central Lithuania unlike the LitBel Republic has never been mentioned in school and university textbooks. Only now is this historic truth is being revealed.

How our Borders Changed in the 20th Century

By the beginning of the 20th century the ethnographical territories of Belarus which had been recorded in detail in the population census of 1897 had been fully formed. There also existed well-known geographical and historical centres, where the national elite was raised and worked. Initially these centres were Vilnia and Miensk, followed by Polatsk, Viciebsk, Mahilioŭ, and Smalensk. Later the cities of Western Belarus: Hrodna, Bielastok, Slonim and Brest were added to the list.

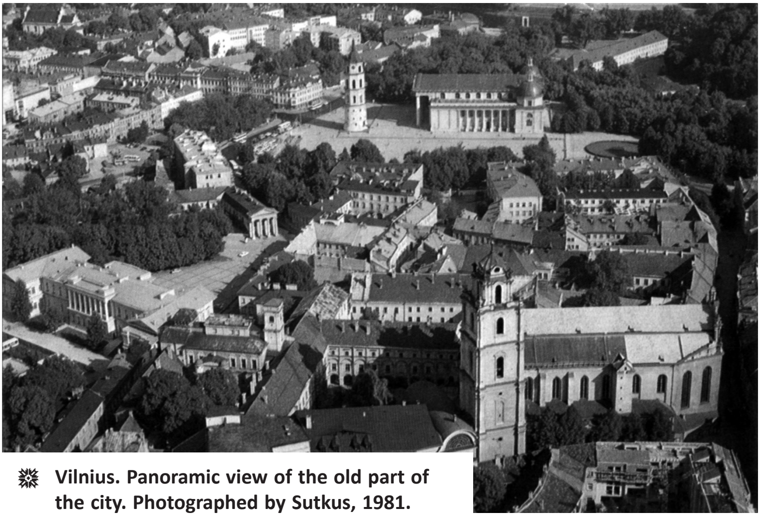
Vilnia, Smalensk and Bielastok had always been the most disputed cities and they played a crucial role in forming Belarusan mentality in life-changing events throughout the tortuous history of the country.

This view was promoted by Adam Kirkor in «Picturesque Russia»[1] (Volume 3, 1882) and in the corresponding maps of Jaŭkhim Karski. In addition, Germany also regarded those cities as Belarusan both before and during the First World War.

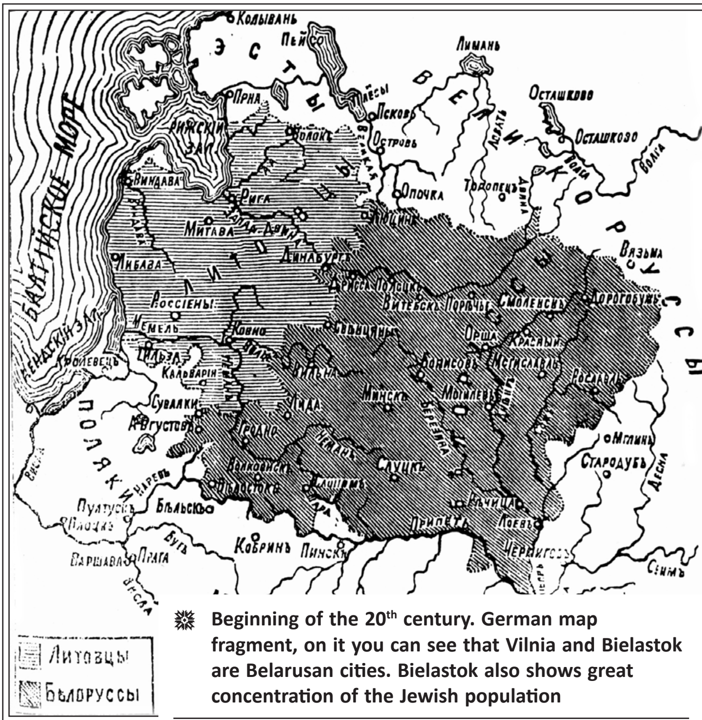
In the 20th century they were either regarded or disregarded as belonging to the appearing and disappearing Belarusan countries, i. e. the BNR, LitBel and the BSSR. The view of the people was not sought and no referenda were held (which in any case were forbidden for many years

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[1] Picturesque Russia. Volume 3, Part 1: Lithuanian Polessie. Part 2. Belarusan Polessie. St. Petersburg, 1882 (facsimile reprint. Minsk, 1993). In 1879–1884 Wolf issued a series of large volumes of illustrated descriptions of Russian regions under the title «Picturesque Russia». The third volume is dedicated to Lithuania and Belarus (1882, reprinted in Belarus — 1993; Lithuanian translation — 1995). They were for the most part Kirkor's essays on history, popular and high culture and local history of Lithuania and Belarus, with the characteristics of the Lithuanian language and mythology.



Vilnius. Panoramic view of the old part of the city. Photographed by Sutkus, 1981.



Beginning of the 20th century. German map fragment, on it you can see that Vilnia and Bielastok are Belarusan cities. Bielastok also shows great concentration of the Jewish population

in the USSR). These decisions were made arbitrarily by the Bolsheviks to meet their political or strategic ends[1].

By the end of 1918, when the German occupation was over, and after the signing of the Brest Treaty in particular, the first place in the political history of Belarus and seat of government was given to Smalensk, where the majority of the Belarusan intelligentsia lived (Yanka Kupala among them).

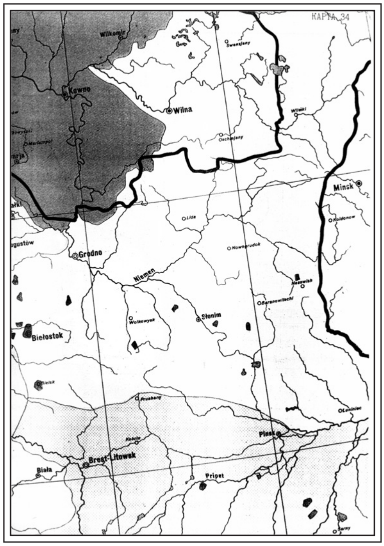
On December 30, 1918 the Western Commune (Заходняя Камуна), a district of Western Russia, declared itself to be the BSSR. That decision was taken at the 4th North-Western Conference of the Russian Communist Party (its Belarusan affiliation), which designated it to be the First Congress of the Communist Party of Belarus. On the same day the country borders were defined. On December 31, 1918 the first Congress of the Communist Party of Belarus announced in Smalensk that the country of the Soviet Socialist Belarus Republic (SSBR) was formed in the area of ethnic resettlement of Belarusans. At the beginning of January, 1919 members of the Belarusan government met with Yanka Kupala.

On January 2, 1919 Miensk[2] was proclaimed the capital of the country and on January 3 the government moved to Miensk. On January 4 the article

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[1] In December 1918, Mitteleuropa was obsolete as the Germans withdrew from the Ober-Ost territory, and for the next few years in the newly created political vacuum the territories of Belarus would witness the struggle of various national and foreign factions. On 3 December 1918 the Germans withdrew from Minsk. On 10 December 1918 Soviet troops occupied Minsk. The Rada (Council) of the Belarus National Republic went into exile, first to Kaunas, then to Berlin and finally to Prague. On January 2, 1919, the Soviet Socialist Republic of Belorussia was declared. On 17 February 1919 it was disbanded. Part of it was included into RSFSR, and part was joined to the Lithuanian SSR to form the LBSSR, Lithuanian-Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, informally known as LitBel, whose capital was Vilnius. While Belarus National Republic faced off with LitBel, foreign powers were preparing to reclaim what they saw as their territories: Polish forces were moving from the West, and Russians from the East. When Vilnius was captured by Polish forces on 17 April 1919, the capital of the Soviet puppet state Litbel was moved to Minsk. On 17 July 1919 Lenin dissolved LitBel because of the pressure of Polish forces advancing from the West. Polish troops captured Minsk on 8 August 1919.

[2] The Old East Slavic name of the town was Мѣньскъ (i. e. Mĕnsk), derived from a river name Mĕn (Mēnŭ, with the same etymology as German Main). The direct continuation of this name in Belarusan is Miensk. However, some Belarusan-speakers continue to use Miensk (spelled Менск) as their preferred name for the city.



German map fragment (early 20th century) showing Vilnia and Bielastok as Belarusan cities. (Bielastok also had the greatest concentration of the Jewish population.)

«Let Communist Belarus Live!» by Maxim Garetski was published in the Smalensk Newspaper Izvestia («Известия»).

However, as early as January 16, 1919 Adolph Joffe[1] was sent to Miensk to divide the SSBR in order to create another country — LitBel. He proposed to create a buffer country instead — the Belarusan and Lithuanian Republic. To lessen pressure of Belarusan nationalism they decided to cut the Viciebsk, Mahilioŭ and Smalensk hubernias away from the BSSR. On January 23 the Smalensk authorities opted out of the BSSR.

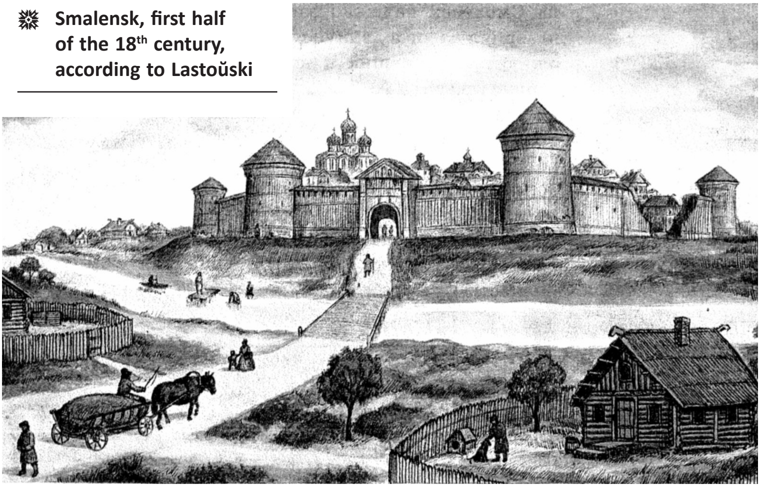
On February 2–3, 1919 the 1^{st} Soviet congress of the BSSR agreed to withdraw the three Eastern hubernias of the country and gained consensus on union with the Lithuanian Soviet Republic. On 17–21 February, 1919 the 1^{st} congress of Soviet Lithuania took place.

On February 27, 1919 the Workers' and Peasants' Government was created and a new Soviet Socialist Lithuanian-Belarusan Republic, consisting of Minsk, Vinya, Hrodna, and a part of Koŭna hubernias was established with the capital in Vilnia.

So, after Smalensk and Miensk, Vilnia became the capital of the country. It was the capital of Belarus from February 27 to April 28, 1919. On April

[1] Adolph Abramovich Joffe (October 10, 1883, Simferopol — November 16, 1927, Moscow) was a Communist revolutionary, a Bolshevik politician and a Soviet diplomat of Karaite Jewish descent. In Russia, Joffe was close to the Menshevik faction within the Russian Social Democratic Party. However, after moving to Vienna in May 1906, he became close to Leon Trotsky's position and helped Trotsky edit Pravda from 1908 to 1912 while studying medicine and psychoanalysis. He also used his family's fortune to support Pravda financially.

Smalensk, first half of the 18th century, according to Lastoŭski



28 the LitBel government moved to Miensk, because Vilnia was occupied by the Poles. Vilnia became Soviet again in September 1939, and next time it happened in July 1940[1].

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[1] World War II began with the German invasion of Poland in September 1939. The secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact had partitioned Lithuania and Poland into German and Soviet spheres of interest. On September 19, 1939, Vilnius was seized by the Soviet Union (which invaded Poland on 17 September). At first, the city was incorporated into the Belorussian SSR, as the city was a centre for Belarusan culture and politics for over a century. The heads of Soviet Belarus moved to the city, Belarusan Language schools were opened, as well as a newspaper (Віленская праўда — The Wilno Praŭda). These actions were encouraged by Soviet Union leaders until it was decided to use Vilnius as one of the pretexts to begin interfering in Lithuanian internal affairs. The USSR and Lithuania concluded a mutual assistance treaty on 10 October 1939, with which the Lithuanian government accepted the presence of Soviet military bases in various parts of the country. On 28 October 1939, the Red Army withdrew from the city to its suburbs (to Naujoji Vilnia) and Vilnius was given over to Lithuania. A Lithuanian Army parade took place on 29 October 1939 through the city centre. The Lithuanians immediately attempted to Lithuanize the city, for example by Lithuanizing Polish schools. However, the whole of Lithuania was annexed by the Soviet Union on 3 August 1940 following a June ultimatum from the Soviets demanding, among other things, that unspecified numbers of Red Army soldiers be allowed to enter the country for the purpose of helping to form a more pro-Soviet government. After the

In 1920 the Bolsheviks gave some parts of Belarus to Lithuania and Latvia, they wanted to have these countries as allies in their struggle against Poland. First, on July 12, 1920 they signed a treaty with Lithuania, according to which Vilnia and a major part of the former Vilnia hubernia populated by Belarusans was given to Lithuania. Hrodna, one of the biggest cities of Belarus, also became Lithuanian. In September Lithuanian soldiers were already in Vilnia, but on October 9 the 52,000 strong Army of Žalihoŭski dislodged them from the city. The Lithuanian government moved to Shaulyai and Žalihoŭski announced the establishment of the puppet country of Central Lithuania and quickly arranged elections in the local Sejm. In February 1922 Central Lithuania became part of Poland.

On August 11 the Bolsheviks recognized Latvia and gave them the three paviets of Dzvinsk, Režyck and Lucyn, mainly populated by Belarusans. In exchange the Bolsheviks got the rights to use the Latvian sea ports of Libava[1] and Vindava[2] for profitable trade with the West.

In May-June Latvia gave Lithuania the cities and suburbs of Majeikyai and Palanga[3]. The total area was 200 km^2. In response Lithuania gave Latvia a piece of the Dzvinsk territory populated by Belarusans, its total square metreage was 299 km^2. The Belarusans, who for centuries had populated those lands, suddenly found themselves living in another country — Latvia.

In 1920 a re-divided Belarus Soviet Socialist Republic consisted of only six paviets from the former Minsk hubernia. Country leaders began their struggle to regain the Belarusan cities and territories of which it had been deprived. In autumn 1920 this problem was raised by the Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus — Wilhelm

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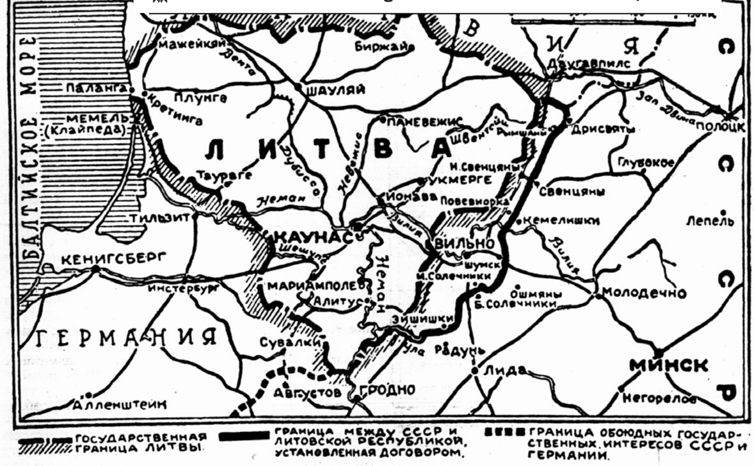
ultimatum was issued and Lithuania further occupied, a Soviet government was installed with Vilnius as the capital of the newly created Lithuanian SSR. Up to 40,000 of the city's inhabitants were subsequently arrested by the NKVD and sent to gulags in the far eastern areas of the Soviet Union. The Soviets devastated city industries, moving the major Polish radio factory Elektrit, along with a part of its labour force, to Minsk in Belarus, where it was renamed the Vyacheslav Molotov Radio Factory, after Stalin's Minister of Foreign Affairs.

[1] Libau → Libava → Liepāja (1917).

[2] Windau → Ventspils (parallel use until 1920s).

[3] Palanga is a seaside resort town in western Lithuania, on the shore of the Baltic Sea. It is the busiest summer resort in Lithuania and has beaches of sand (18 km long and up to 300 m wide) and beautiful sand dunes. Officially Palanga has the status of a city municipality and includes Šventoji, Nemirseta, Būtingė and other settlements, which are considered as part of the city of Palanga.

Belarusan Viĺnia as 'a gift' from Stalin to Lithuania, 1939

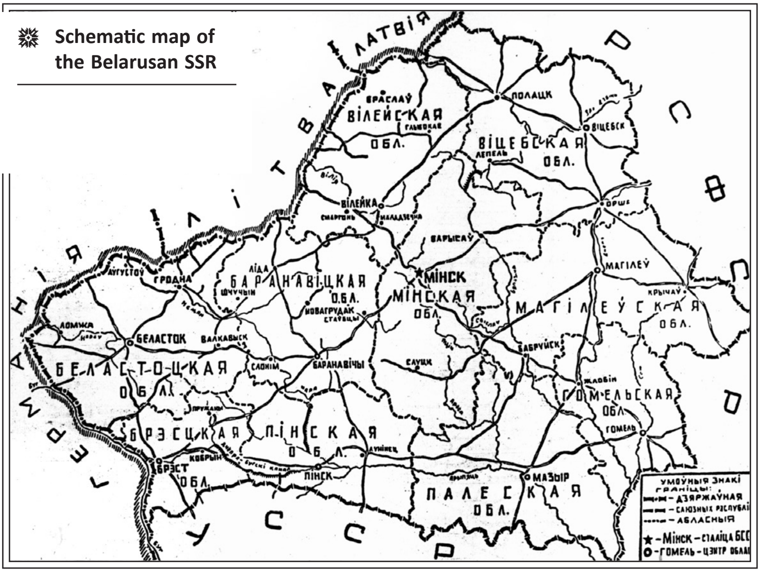


Knoryn (Knorynsh). In September 1922 the authorities of the BSSR highlighted the issue, their justification was the necessity of common military defense — and a bigger republic would better defend the western borders of the USSR. Moscow politely acknowledged the argument but the majority of local bureaucrats, not being Belarus nationals, opposed. However, the rural population wanted to be reunited and they voted for it to happen on volosts/township gatherings.

Eventually on March 7, 1924 fifteen paviets and cities as Viciebsk, Polatsk and Mahilioŭ were returned to the BSSR. However, far from all the territories populated by Belarusans rejoined the country. The former Mscislaŭ paviet, for example, was divided in half and such Belarusan town settlements as Hislavičy and Pačynak remained in Russia.

In August 1926 Belarus asked Moscow to return the Homiel hubernia and the three southern paviets of the Pskoŭ hubenia with centres in Nevel[1], Sebež and Vieliž. In December 1926 only Homiel and Rečyca were returned. Up untill the end of the 1920's negotiations continued about returning the above mentioned paviets and some other paviets of the Smalensk hubernia. A corresponding map was even published in the newspaper 'Звязда'. However, Stalin's repressions began and all the activity was stopped.

[1] Nevel is a town in Pskoŭ Oblast, Russia, located on Lake Nevel some 242 km southeast of Pskoŭ.



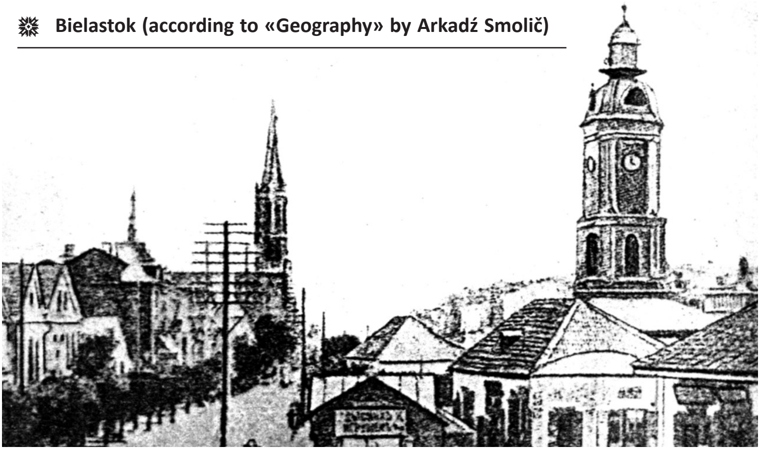
Schematic map of the Belarusan SSR

In 1937 the idea of transferring the capital of the BSSR from Minsk to Mahilioŭ was suggested. A new government house had already been built in Mahilioŭ, but in 1939 everything changed.

On September 17, 1939 the rejoining of Western Belarus, which had been given to Poland by the Bolsheviks in March 1921, with the BSSR and the USSR began. To place this event on record the Bolsheviks gave the name of September 17 to a street in every settlement of Western Belarus, which still exists today.

Under this reorganization Vilnia belonged to Belarus again, but not for very long. On October 10, 1939 soldiers of the Red Army had been in Vilnia for a couple of weeks already. Arrests of Belarusan national activists, who had just been welcoming the arrival of the Soviet Army and dreaming about joining the BSSR, began at nights. Polish military personnel, civil servants, and Jewish bourgeois saved themselves as best they could from various pogroms. However, events came to a head on the morning of October 10, 1939 when Vilnia woke up in a new country — the Lithuanian Republic. There were Lithuanian soldiers and police in the streets of the city. The uniforms of the Lithuanian police made a strong impression on the citizens of Vilnia as did the 'alien' language, which nobody knew or spoke.

Bielastok (according to «Geography» by Arkadź Smolič)



Soviet newspapers published Molotov's comments, where he acknowledged that only a few Lithuanians lived in Vilnia and its districts; however, it was given to Lithuania for the political benefits of the USSR — 'Full stop'. Since then no such city as Vilnia has been shown on European maps — but Vilnius appeared instead.

Just imagine for a moment that if the former Russian capital of Saint Petersburg had been occupied by the Germans and they gave it over to the neighboring country of Finland, and the new hosts changed its name to one that a Slavic ear is not accustomed to. That would also be close to what Germans feel when they hear Kaliningrad instead of Königsberg.

This is how a Vilnia citizen, one of the Belarusan intelligentsia, recalled those October 1939 days in Vilnia:

«On October 22, 1939 Lithuanian policemen, as bright as peacocks, arrived in Vilnia, and those who survived the arrests stayed alive. The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) of the Bolsheviks raided everything possible and took the spoils to the east.

On October 28 Lithuanian police overran the city. Their uniforms were dark blue trench coats with red badges of rank and red cap bands, and they spoke only Lithuanian (Samogitian[1]). Because of the strange way they looked

[1] Samogitian of the Lithuanian language spoken mostly in Samogitia (in the western part of Lithuania). Certain attempts have been made to standardize it. The Samogitian dialect should not be confused with the middle dialect of the Lithuanian language, that sometimes was referred to as the Samogitian language as spoken between the 16th and 18th centuries.



How Stalin moved countries' borders

and the language they spoke the citizens of Vilnia called them «калакутасы» (kalakutas) which meant turkeys. The following day a brigade of the Lithuanian army entered the city, followed by hundreds of Shaulis[1]*, who were hurrying to take up the top jobs.*

Lithuanian (Žamoits) armed forces entered Vilnia as foreigners who were occupying a foreign city. The percentage of Lithuanians among the population in the city was below 2% and they were lost in the ocean of the Slavic population. That is why the Lithuanian troops were not welcomed or greeted.

New rules were soon introduced. Old Vilnia citizens of Belarusan and Polish origins were sacked from local government, railway administration, and management in plants, factories, institutions and schools. Those positions were taken by undereducated replacements. Soon street names, signs and other markings were changed. The Lithuanian (Žamoits) language was rapidly introduced into all governmental institutions. Vilnia became dumb and mute: translators were needed everywhere. People complained, swore and rebelled that they couldn't even talk about their most urgent needs in their own language in their own city»[2].

[1] Shaulis means a shooter of the paramilitary organization in Lithuania, trained like partizans.

[2] Yazeph Maletski, 'Under the Sign of Pahonia', Taronta, 1976.

On the other side you can imagine how Vinya would look now if it had stayed in the BSSR. This is how Zianon Pazniak[1], whose grandfather Yanka Pazniak who lived in Vilnia before the war, sees it:

«However, if in 1939 Vilnia had remained Belarusan and was rebuilt as the capital of Belarus (as had been planned by the Communists) and the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus sat there with all its departments and officials, what would have survived in our beautiful city? The Communist would have ruined all its cathedrals, removed its old streets, blown up cultural monuments; everything would be in a mess, spoiled and ruined. The Gedimin mountain would have been razed to the ground by bureaucrats from the city Council and the Department of Architecture and a lake or a Metro station would have been created at its place, — like they did it in Minsk. They would have developed it into a city with 2 million people, erected giant chemical factories, cut down forests, and brought in an alien work force and would have enjoyed all that ugliness and silliness. But pain gnaws at my heart, when I visit my parents' house»[2].

Bielastok, just like Vilnia, was temporarily part of Belarus as well. Bielastok was made Soviet in September 1939. Here, in this city a meeting of the peoples' representatives took place to discuss the annexation of Western Belarus to the BSSR and consequently the USSR.

Up until summer 1944 Bielastok was one of the oblast centres of the BSSR, when Stalin presented it to Communist Poland with a large portion of the Bielavežskaja Pušča so that the Poles had wood to rebuild their capital of Warsaw. In the summer of 1944 the Belarusans nearly lost Polatsk and its oblast. How it happened is for a curious reader to find out.

In 1939 Belarusans had territorial disputes with Ukraine about the southern part of Western Belarus. In November that year Nikita Khrushchev planned to join the Belarusan cities of Brest, Pružany, Stolin, Pinsk, Kobryn and Luninec to Ukraine. On November 22 Ponomarenko[3] and Khrushchev

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[1] Zianon Pazniak is a Belarusan nationalist politician, one of the founders of the Belarusan Popular Front and leader of the Christian Conservative Party of the BPF. He has lived in emigration since 1996.

[2] Thoughts: Conceptions of Belarusan Revival. Book N1, 2007, p.15.

[3] Panteleimon Kondrat'evich Ponomarenko (9 August 1902 — 18 January 1984) was a general in the Red Army before becoming a Soviet administrator in Belarus and then Cossackhstan. He was born in Krasnodar Krai, Russia.

From 1938 to 1947 Ponomarenko was the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Belorussia, and from 1944 to 1948 also the Chairman of the Council of Ministers. During World War II, he led Communist partisan units within

discussed the issue with Stalin. Khrushchev referred to the Ukrainian national heroes — Nalivaiko[1] and Bogdan Khmelnitsky, who in 16–17th centuries attempted to conquer Southern Belarus. However, Stalin took side of Ponomarenko and said that to consider Brest and the Bielavežskaja Pušča as Ukrainian would be at least unfair.

A new threat to borders of Belarus came in August 1944, when Malenkov and Khrushchev wanted to join the ancient Belarus city of Polatsk to Russia. On August 14 a meeting with Stalin was arranged to discuss it and Ponomarenko managed to prove that Polatsk with its oblast belonged to Belarus.

«Comrade Ponomarenko had three decisive arguments during negotiations with Stalin. The first was that Polatsk had belonged to Soviet Belarus for more than 20 years. The second one was very important: it was the city where a Belarusan printing pioneer Frantishak Skaryna[2] was born. But the most crucial fact was that the Soviet Belarus had already suffered enough: several Belarusan regions including Vilnia had already been given to Lithuania, and then they were going to give the Bielastok territories to Poland and if Polatsk were annexed as well it would be an offense, impossible to understand and accept. After much thoughts Stalin conceded to these arguments»[3].

It is necessary to mention that in August 1940, when independent Lithuania was transformed into the Soviet Lithuanian Republic (the LSSR), Stalin

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Nazi-occupied Belarus. He clashed with the Polish underground and gave orders for his troops to disarm them and execute the officers. In this aspect the forces under Ponomarenko's command initiated a limited cooperation with the Nazi occupation forces informing on members of the Polish underground.

From 16 October 1952 until 6 March 1953 Ponomarenko was a member of the Politburo of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. He was made First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Cossackh SSR in 1954 before becoming the Soviet ambassador to Poland between 1955 and 1957. Ponomarenko also taught diplomacy and assisted in the creation of the National Jazz Orchestra in Minsk.

[1] Severyn Nalivaiko (died April 21, 1597) was a leader of the Ukrainian Cossacks who became a hero of Ukrainian folklore.

[2] Francysk Skaryna was a Belarusan famous as one of the first publishers in Eastern Europe, laying groundwork for the development of the Belarusan-Belarusan language. He was born in the historical Belarusan city of Polatsk into the family of a wealthy merchant. The exact dates of birth and death are unknown; the two most probable estimates are 1485–1540 and 1490–1551.

[3] Zenkovich N. 'To whom does Belarus belong? Borders. Disputes. Insults.' — M. 2000.

gave it another piece of Western Belarus including the cities of Sventyany (Švenčionys), Salechniki *(*Šalčininkai*)* and Druskeniki (Druskininkai**)**. For a couple of months Lithuanian and Belarusan Communists had been having long disputes about ownership of Druskininkai[1], but the Lithuanian Communists won. Therefore another 2,000 km^2 of the Belarusan territory was annexed to join the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic.

On August 10, 1945 a law on the Soviet-Polish border was adopted. According to it Poland received nearly all the former Bielastok oblast of the BSSR and two regions of the Brest oblast with the cities of Bielastok, Aŭgustaŭ, Bielsk, Lomža, Gainaŭka and others. In 1950 Poland additionally received some other Belarusan villages.

Belarus was among the member-countries, which established the United Nations Organization. Together with other countries Belarus won the Second World War and despite all that it was the only country which lost part of its ethnic territories.

When Nikita Khrushchev was in power he 'graciously' donated the Crimean to Ukraine (from Russia). Plans also existed to give the Kaliningrad (Königsberg) oblast to the BSSR (it is and it was in the Russian Federation then). They even drew 'a Belarusan corridor' to the Baltic Sea through Lithuania and Poland. They wanted to give the Belarusan city of Hrodna to Lithuania. But their plans were not realized; as a result in 1964 Belarus received 8 villages to the east of the country, which were joined to the Mscislaŭ paviet.

In December 1991 the independent Republic of Belarus emerged on the map of Europe within the borders of 1964. However, at the fall of the USSR the question of Belarusan borders was brought up again. The Presidium of the Supreme Soviets of the BSSR raised the question of the ownership of Vilnia. A corresponding manifest (claim) was adopted. If Lithuania was seceding from the USSR, the BSSR would lay claims on the Vilnia Krai territories. Moscow's policy-makers were also frightening Lithuanian independence seekers about the possibility of Polish autonomy creating, something similar to the Transdniestria Republic[2]. There was even

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[1] Druskininkai is a spa town on the Neman River in southern Lithuania, close to the borders of Belarus and Poland. The city of Druskininkai has a population of 18,233 (2001 Census) and dates back as a spa resort to the 19th century.

[2] Transnistria, also known as Trans-Dniester or Transdniestria, is a breakaway territory located mostly on a strip of land between the Dniester River and the eastern Moldovan border to Ukraine. Since its declaration of independence

an attempt made to organize an armed conflict on the Belarus-Lithuanian border, when several Lithuanian customs officers were shot by unidentified persons. However, efforts in making the two nations enemies, as was the case in the Armenian-Azerbaijan conflict, were in vain.

At the same time there was a plan to create a sort of «Yotvingians» (Яцвягі; Jacviahi) autonomy with its capital in Pinsk. They even issued a newspaper in an unknown language, in which the Western Paliessie dialect of the Belarusan language was used. However, this venture also failed.

In August-September 1991 some Moscow politicians claimed that Belarus had to give the Viciebsk territories and a piece of Mahilioŭ oblast to Russia.

After the declaration of independence by Belarus the question arose about the exact extent of its borders. During the Soviet period only the one border with Poland was defined, which served as the Soviet iron curtain. Later the borders with Latvia and Lithuania were drawn. However, there were disputes between Belarus with Lithuania about the railway station of Haidutishki (Haiduciški). In the Soviet times it was situated on Lithuanian soil, but at the same time administratively it belonged to the Belarusan railway system. It was only in autumn 1994 that Belarus gave it to Lithuania without financial claim. Before that Belarus received payments in compensation for its use. On October 26, 1996 Belarus ratified the Belarus-Lithuanian border treaty. This treaty judicially defined and confirmed the state borders on the «soviet» border basis of 1940.

Regarding the border with Ukraine its definition is nearly complete, but has not been signed yet. The most unclear borders Belarus has are with Russia. It is likely that there will be problems in the nearest future, when land ownership will be introduced. This can be illustrated by the information from the newspaper «Народная Воля» from July 27, 2007, №119–120. Rangers of the Sebež National Park, which is in the Pskoŭ oblast of Russia,

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in 1990, and especially after the War of Transnistria in 1992, it is governed de facto as the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic (PMR, also known as «Pridnestrovie»), an unrecognized state which claims the territory to the east of the river Dniester, the city of Bender and its surrounding localities located on the west bank. The modern Republic of Moldova does not recognize the secession and considers territories controlled by the PMR to be part of Moldova's autonomous region of Stînga Nistrului («Left Bank of the Dniester»). Transnistria's sovereignty is unrecognized by any United Nations member state and it has no diplomatic relations with them.

complained that their Belarusan colleagues from the Verkhnyadzvinsk[1] forestry had cut down trees on Russian territory. It appeared that the Belarusan side also had ownership papers for the same territory. On top of that both sides found out that 5 sections of the forest didn't belong to anybody at all so it was decided that nobody should fell trees there.

It is understood that the borders of the today's Europe are settled. But what to do about the varied interpretations of borders and territories in text-books, research studies, and particularly the numerous maps published in different countries of the world? This is the political aspect of the problem. We simply must know and seek out those maps. That is why a research approach towards history is necessary — to have discussions, conferences and disputes about it. Historic events show that there is nothing that is unchanged, borders as well. It is beyond our wish that country borders were changing, are changing and will be changing. The other thing is how it was done, and in future, how it will be done.

Recently in Europe, the world saw the unique case of Czechoslovakia where the country was divided into two separate countries. The Czechs and the Slovaks sat at the table and divided everything amicably and peacefully. They have no territorial pretensions to each other now and the border between the two countries is open.

At the other end of the spectrum is the example of Yugoslavia. We know how much blood was shed there. That is why it is very important to know the historical background and to be respectful to the country you border with. When we are setting a task to associate ourselves with the lost cultural and historical heritage of our country, we think that the most civil way to do it is for Belarus to join the European Union. Then we'll need no visas to go to Vilnia or Bielastok. The most important thing is to know our history, its historical and cultural monuments and to have the right to freely visit our historic cities without obstacles, without visas.

[1] Verkhnedvinsk, or Verkhnyadzvinsk, is a city in Belarus in the northwest of Viciebsk Voblast; it is the administrative center of the Verkhnedvinsk raion. Until 1962, it was named Drissa. It is located at the confluence of the Drissa River and the Dzvina River.